POLICY Review

APRIL & MAY 2000, NO. 100

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JOHN J. PITNEY JR.

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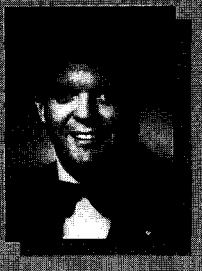

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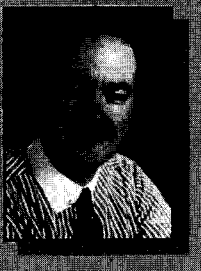

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Features

3 **THE COMING ASCENT OF CONGRESS**
And the diminishing power of the presidency
John J. Pitney Jr.

15 **SMOKE, FIRE, AND WHAT TO DO IN ASIA**
The continuing case for U.S. preeminence
Ashley J. Tellis

35 **FROM YELTSIN TO PUTIN**
Milestones on an unfinished journey
Ariel Cohen

51 **MARIJUANA ON THE BALLOT**
Medical science won't support smoking
James R. McDonough

63 **TALL TALES FROM THE FAMILY FARM**
Five persistent myths and the life they obscure
Victor Davis Hanson

Books

81 **RICHARD RORTY, LIBERAL ABSOLUTIST**
Damon Linker on **Philosophy and Social Hope** *by* Richard Rorty

86 **DO-GOODERS AND DOUBLE STANDARDS**
John Podhoretz on **The Paradox of American Democracy: Elites, Special Interests, and the Betrayal of Public Trust** *by* John B. Judis

Letters

91 Humanitarian war; *Emil Ginter* on health in Russia

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POLICY *Review*

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Policy Review (ISSN 0146-5945) is published bimonthly by The Heritage Foundation, a research and educational institute that formulates and promotes conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense. For more information, write The Heritage Foundation, 214 Massachusetts Avenue NE, Washington DC 20002 or visit www.heritage.org. Periodicals postage paid at Washington DC and additional mailing offices.

The opinions expressed in *Policy Review* are those of the authors and editors and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Heritage Foundation.

Policy Review is designed by Mitzi Hamilton for Bird-in-Hand Productions.

EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICES: Address letters to *Policy Review*, 214 Massachusetts Avenue NE, Washington DC 20002-4999. Telephone: 202-546-4400. Fax: 202-608-6136. Email: polrev@heritage.org. Internet site: www.policyreview.com. Direct advertising inquiries and reprint permission requests to Leslie Gardner. Reproduction of editorial content without permission is prohibited.

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION: Contact *Policy Review*, Subscriptions Department, 214 Massachusetts Avenue NE, Washington DC 20002-4999, or call toll-free 1-800-566-9449. Foreign subscribers call 202-608-6161. For address changes (allow six weeks), provide old and new address, including ZIP codes. Postmaster: Send address changes to *Policy Review*, Subscriptions Department, 214 Massachusetts Avenue NE, Washington DC 20002-4999. Subscription rates: one year, $36; two years, $72; three years, $108. Add $10 per year for foreign delivery. U.S.A. newsstand distribution by Eastern News, Inc., One Media Way, 12406 Route 250, Milan OH 44846-9705. For newsstand inquiries, call 1-800-221-3148.

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The Coming Ascent Of Congress

By JOHN J. PITNEY JR.

HONEST AND PRINCIPLED he may not have been, but President Clinton seemed in 1999 to be the very model of an effective executive. He had turned impeachment against the congressional Republicans. He was setting the domestic agenda on issues ranging from health insurance to gun control. And he used massive airpower in the Kosovo conflict, overcoming the deep reservations of lawmakers and the initial skittishness of ordinary citizens.

Apparently, he had achieved an historic reversal. Just four years earlier, quick House action on the "Contract with America" led many observers to conclude that the balance of power had tipped from the president to the Congress. Newt Gingrich went on television to deliver his own version of a state of the union address, while Clinton had to remind the press that he was still relevant.

Now, Gingrich was gone and Clinton was back on top. The executive branch would once again dominate Washington.

Or would it? With the Clinton administration, appearances and expectations have only a faint resemblance to underlying realities. (Recall how we were going to bring democracy and domestic tranquility to Haiti?) Despite all the attention they got at the time, Clinton's political victories were more personal than institutional. He could win, not because the presidency itself was getting stronger, but because his GOP opponents had weaknesses he could attack. On the House side, Republicans came to power without real experience in national governance: Not one of them had ever chaired a com-

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mittee. Moreover, they had only a thin majority, which put them at the mercy of every small band of internal dissidents. On the Senate side, where individual talents and flaws make more difference, the majority had a distressing number of weak links. Some routinely broke ranks on major issues, while others provided Democratic opposition researchers with a wealth of ammunition. During the Whitewater hearings, chaired by Sen. Al D'Amato of New York, White House aides supplied reporters with the "D'Amato Ethics Sampler," a set of clippings documenting the senator's own stumbles.

There is nothing permanent about such weaknesses. Politicians can learn from mistakes, and elections can transform the Capitol roster. Madison's ghost does not respect party lines. During the Reagan-Bush years, many conservatives wanted to give the presidency the upper hand over Congress, whereas liberals thought the natural order of things should favor the legislature; the change in control of both branches has since brought an outpouring of contrary sentiment. In a farsighted article in the summer 1990 *Public Interest*, then-Rep. Mickey Edwards, Oklahoma Republican, warned that neither party had a lock on either branch.

In any case, Congress and the presidency are more than the people who occupy them. On this level, we see a different picture, where the institutions change gradually as a result of laws, precedents, and social trends. Notwithstanding Clinton's short-term successes, the institutional balance has not shifted to the White House. In important ways, the presidency has grown weaker, partially because Clinton cared more for his own survival than for the health of the institution. And in spite of partisan stalemate, Congress retains basic strengths and has the potential for greater power in the new century.

Madison, Tocqueville, and the bomb

To anticipate the future, we need to start by understanding some institutional history. "In republican government," Madison wrote in *Federalist* 51, "the legislative authority necessarily predominates." The nineteenth century bore out this observation. Most of the time, policy came from Capitol Hill instead of the White House, and congressional leaders left bigger footprints than presidents. Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and John C. Calhoun remain major historical figures while William Henry Harrison and Zachary Taylor are notable mainly because they died on the job. Of course, the most important exception to the pattern of weak presidents was Abraham Lincoln.

Coming to America three decades before the Lincoln presidency, Alexis de Tocqueville shrewdly explained why the White House stood at a disadvantage. A nation's executive power mainly involves foreign affairs, he wrote, but since vast oceans separated America from the rest of the world, its international dealings were meager. Without large fleets and armies, the com-

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mander in chief's power existed mostly on paper. "The President of the United States possesses almost royal prerogatives, which he has no opportunity of exercising. . . . The laws allow him to be strong but circumstances keep him weak." James K. Polk's assertiveness in the Mexican War offered a glimpse of this potential power, but it was Lincoln's leadership in the Civil War that showed how far a president could reach when the guns started to fire. Detractors accused him of tyranny, citing such measures as the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus. Even then, however, he could not keep lawmakers from influencing policy and investigating the war effort. At one point, the House Judiciary Committee briefly looked into charges that Mary Lincoln was a security risk.

Right after the conflict, Congress resumed its ascendancy. In a political fight with President Andrew Johnson, Congress passed legislation forcing a president to get Senate approval before firing anyone from any post requiring Senate confirmation. When Johnson defied the law, the House impeached him and the Senate came within a single vote of removing him. Lacking spinmeisters such as James Carville, Johnson could not depict the outcome as a triumph over the politics of personal destruction. Public opinion sided with Congress, which continued to work its will over policy. The next several presidents were unwilling or unable to take the lead, though Grover Cleveland did cast 414 vetoes in his first administration, more than twice the combined total of all his predecessors.

America's world leadership required an ongoing commitment to a large defense establishment.

During the twentieth century, the balance shifted toward the executive. This change grew out of several developments, the most important of which was America's rise as a global power. To stir morale during World War I, the Wilson administration set up an elaborate propaganda operation. It worked so well that it not only supplied a template for later military conflicts, but also laid the foundation for the modern public relations industry. (Mrs. Clinton may have known of this historical link when she dubbed her husband's communications center the "War Room.") A generation later, Pearl Harbor convinced Americans that the oceans would no longer protect us. Believing that the nation's survival was at stake, lawmakers authorized the president to run a massive mobilization. Quietly and with few questions, congressional leaders agreed to hide funding for the Manhattan Project.

After Hiroshima, the nation did not demobilize as thoroughly as with previous wars. America's world leadership, together with the growing threat from the Soviet Union, required an ongoing commitment to a large defense establishment. In 1947, Congress passed the National Security Act, which created the Defense Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the

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National Security Council, the latter consisting only of executive officials and reporting only to the president. Congress did not take the parallel step of reorganizing its relevant committees. Scholar James Sundquist writes, "The picture was clear: the president would prepare the unified and coordinated policy; if legislation or appropriations were required, the Congress would review and respond."

As the Cold War unfolded, presidents would fight in Korea, mount countless covert operations, and generally leave their own personal stamp on American foreign policy. More than that, they gained a new standing in the public mind, for they held something that no one had ever had before: the power to cause or prevent the destruction of all life on earth. A century earlier, a president was simply the chief magistrate. Now he was the Man Who Kept the Missiles Away. Naturally enough, presidents used this stature to gain support on foreign policy issues and — with less success — in domestic affairs. Kennedy argued that civil rights legislation was a matter of national security, reasoning that the Soviets were exploiting American segregation for propaganda purposes. Nixon even cited national security to justify the sacking of Watergate special prosecutor Archibald Cox. "Elliot," he reportedly told Attorney General Richardson, "Brezhnev wouldn't understand if I didn't fire Cox after all this."

The Cold War confirmed two of Tocqueville's prophecies. The first was that America and Russia each were called "by some secret design of Providence one day to hold in its hands the destinies of half the world." The second was about the presidency: "If the Union's existence were constantly menaced, and if its great interests were continually interwoven with those of other powerful nations, one would see the prestige of the executive growing, because of what was expected from it and of what it did."

The blunted sword

VIETNAM DIMINISHED presidential primacy. Though Congress bowed to LBJ's war policy with the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, lawmakers grew increasingly frustrated as the years passed. After failing to stop funding for the war, they resolved not to let another president get the country into such a conflict. One result of this sentiment was the War Powers Resolution of 1973, an attempt to curb presidential warmaking authority. The law was constitutionally questionable and has turned out to be largely ineffectual. Nevertheless, it did signal that Congress would now make it harder for the president to be the Lone Ranger of national security. Two years later, when Gerald Ford asked the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for help in preventing the fall of South Vietnam, Sen. Jacob Javits, New York Republican, told him: "I will give you large sums for evacuation, but not one nickel for military aid." Congress prevailed, South Vietnam fell, and the communists rule to this day.

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Tocqueville had yet another relevant insight, this time about democracies in wartime: "[I]f present ills are great, it is to be feared that they will forget the greater evils that perhaps await them in case of defeat."

Ronald Reagan partially reversed the "Vietnam syndrome" by articulating a clear vision of American principles and doggedly sticking to the goal of rolling back the Soviet empire. In doing so, he still had to contend with congressional micromanagement. For instance, the lawmakers enacted the Boland Amendments, which curbed aid to the rebels fighting the Soviet-backed regime in Nicaragua. Administration efforts to get around these restrictions resulted in the Iran-Contra scandal, which in turn gave Congress an opportunity to go after Reagan with investigations and accusations. Fallout from the scandal continued through the end of the Bush years.

The Cold War ended during Bush's term, and Americans no longer perceived a constant threat to their country's existence.

More than Iran-Contra, we remember Bush for the American victory in the Gulf War. We forget what a close-run thing it was. Though Bush believed that he could constitutionally wage the war on his own authority, politics compelled him to welcome congressional consideration of a resolution of support, and the shift of just three senators would have defeated it. Once it became clear that the war was going well, the opponents nimbly turned around and backed the president — for the moment. Soon after the war, Bush found that he had gained no real political capital, and congressional critics were attacking him for spending too much time on foreign policy.

Tocqueville would have understood. The Cold War ended during Bush's term, and Americans no longer perceived a constant threat to their country's existence. Accordingly, they redefined — some would say "downgraded" — their job description for the presidency. Handling international crises became less vital than understanding domestic problems and fixing the economy. The First Guardian was out. Mr. Goodwrench was in.

The setting was perfect for the election of Bill Clinton in 1992. During the campaign, he had hardly been a pillar of consistency on foreign policy. When a reporter asked about the Gulf War, he said: "I guess I would have voted with the majority if it was a close vote. But I agree with the arguments the minority made." That did not matter, for voters wanted a domestic president. In a *Nightline* interview the day after his election, Clinton said: "I am going to focus like a laser beam on this economy." That focus had already become evident earlier in the day. When foreign leaders phoned to congratulate him, aides asked them to leave a message because he was sleeping.

In his 1996 reelection campaign, he liked to proclaim: "There are no Russian missiles pointed at any American children tonight for the first time

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since the dawn of the nuclear age." In typical Clinton fashion, the claim was misleading, since the Russians could reprogram their missiles toward American targets within minutes. And by implying that foreign policy had stopped being a life-or-death issue for average Americans, he encouraged their tendency to shun international affairs. This implied message also had the unintentional effect of undercutting presidential prestige, for it devalued the one area in which the chief executive has greatest authority.

No president can ignore the world, and Clinton eventually found himself dealing with a long international agenda. His efforts were spasmodic and unsystematic, however. Even his dramatic air strikes against Iraq and Serbia were not nearly as conclusive as they seemed, since Saddam Hussein held onto his weapons of mass destruction, and Slobodan Milosevic remained in power. Why couldn't Clinton bring things to completion? First, our armed forces were already underfunded and overstretched. Second, he was in a weak position to ask Congress and the people for the sacrifice of blood and treasure that would have resulted from ground combat. After winning office on a platform of "the economy, stupid" and telling Americans that their country no longer faced destruction, it would have been hard to explain the need for body bags.

No president can ignore the world, and Clinton eventually found himself dealing with a long international agenda.

Further evidence of presidential weakness on foreign policy came in fall 1999, when the Senate rejected the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Thirty-six years earlier, John F. Kennedy had put his office's prestige behind a limited test ban treaty. Mindful of the need to close ranks before the Soviet Union, Senate Republican Leader Everett Dirksen of Illinois dropped his earlier opposition and sided with JFK, saying: "with consummate faith and some determination, this may be the step that can spell a grander destiny for our country and for the world." The Senate approved the 1963 treaty by a vote of 80-19, with Republicans voting in favor 25-8. Clinton idolized Kennedy but could not repeat his accomplishment. The defeat stemmed from lingering impeachment animosity among Senate Republicans as well as from serious flaws in the treaty. And to a large extent, the defeat was also a symptom of the presidency's reduced leverage. "The commander in chief says he needs it" had ceased to be a clinching argument for lawmakers in the post-Cold War world. Public opinion, which used to rally around the president on foreign policy, had become an uncertain resource. Polls showed that support for the treaty was wide but passionless, which meant that a vote against it carried little political cost. Clinton himself had fostered this crippling indifference: Why get all worked up if the president has assured us that hostile missiles are not pointing at our children?

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In discussions of foreign relations, Clinton often spoke less of military matters than of trade — the international issue over which Congress has clearest jurisdiction. Article I of the Constitution empowers it to "regulate commerce with foreign nations," and through the early part of the twentieth century, the institution held tight to its prerogatives. Change came during the Depression, when the disastrous effects of the Smoot-Hawley bill persuaded lawmakers to delegate tariff making to the executive branch. From then on, presidents would take the lead on trade. In recent decades, lawmakers gave "fast-track" authority to the White House, allowing presidents to negotiate international trade agreements, subject only to a simple up-or-down vote by Congress. This authority strengthened the president's hand in trade talks, since other countries knew that a deal would not be open to amendments that could either cripple it or require renegotiation. Fast-track authority lapsed in 1994. Clinton twice tried to get Congress to revive it, but fell short because of opposition from his own party.

Clinton's failure further weakened the presidency. A future chief executive will have to use up precious political resources in order to regain fast-track authority. And if that proves impossible, then trade agreements will have to get past 535 potential hostage-takers on Capitol Hill, each with the power to demand concessions and favors in return for withholding killer amendments.

The unlocked purse

If the executive branch has customarily controlled the sword of national defense, then the legislative branch has controlled the purse of national finance. In *Federalist* 58, Madison called the power over the purse "the most complete and effectual weapon with which any constitution can arm the immediate representatives of the people." Until 1921, Congress largely ignored the president on fiscal matters, instead working directly with department heads on their funding requests. With the sudden growth of government in World War I, this system proved impractical. Reformers successfully pressed for the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921, which empowered the president to submit a single budget, with the help a newly-formed Budget Bureau. In the words of James Sundquist, "That act made the president a leader, a policy and program initiator, and a manager, whether he wished to be or not." After World War II, Congress further enlarged the president's economic role by establishing the Council of Economic Advisers.

For decades, the balance of power in economic policy making swung back and forth on Pennsylvania Avenue. In the 1970s, lawmakers thought Nixon was tipping it too far in his direction through large-scale impoundments, that is, refusals to spend money that Congress had already appropriated. Together with a Watergate-inspired atmosphere of distrust, this per-

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ceived overreach prompted Congress to pass the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Act of 1974. In addition to stopping unilateral impoundments, the law created a new congressional budget process, separate from the previously uncoordinated procedures for spending and revenue bills. It also established the Congressional Budget Office, which would issue its own estimates, freeing the legislative branch from dependence on the executive branch's sometimes-dubious numbers.

For a few years, Congress regained its dominant position — though it was no great feat to snatch a purse from the hands of Jimmy Carter. Then, the need to fight mounting deficits put a squeeze on the institution. The short-lived 1985 Gramm-Rudman-Hollings law limited congressional options by providing for automatic across-the-board spending cuts in case the deficit exceeded certain targets. In his 1990 "read my lips" budget summit with Congress, President Bush made the politically fatal concession of agreeing to raise taxes. Little noticed at the time was something he got in return: the Budget Enforcement Act of 1990, which superseded Gramm-Rudman-Hollings. The new law gave the Office of Management and Budget greater authority over fiscal estimates and limited Congress's ability to shift money from guns to butter.

Without the discipline of the deficit, Congress is showing a renewed lust for spending.

The budget surplus has opened a new chapter in this saga, for without the discipline of the deficit, Congress is showing a renewed lust for spending. While the president retains much of the initiative in setting broad priorities, any budget ultimately consists of a long list of specifics. If the devil isn't in the details, Congress surely is. Along with friendly bureaucrats and interest groups, lawmakers are hard at work to create new programs and reinvigorate old ones. And they are certainly not above shameless pork barrel spending. According to the taxpayer-watchdog group Citizens Against Government Waste, the appropriations bills for fiscal 2000 contained the highest-ever level of spending earmarked for specific projects in the lawmakers' constituencies. The eight individually passed appropriations bills collectively included more than $14.6 billion in earmarks, including $500,000 for research into swine waste management at North Carolina State University, in the district of Appropriations Committee member David Price.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, Republicans had proposed giving presidents the line-item veto, precisely so they could strike out such projects. During these years, the item veto would have had scant impact on the deficit, since the biggest domestic spending increases lay in mandatory programs such as Social Security. But the ability to threaten cherished hometown projects would have given Reagan and Bush a very large bargaining chip in their dealings with Congress. After years of touting the item veto, Republicans felt an obligation to pass it once they took control of Congress,

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even though it would now belong to Bill Clinton. Their support cooled rapidly as soon as he put GOP projects on the hit list. The Supreme Court soon declared the statute unconstitutional, and many congressional Republicans thought that the ruling had saved them from themselves. Commenting on the court's decision, Sen. Robert Bennett, Utah Republican, thanked Democratic Sens. Robert Byrd of West Virginia and Daniel P. Moynihan of New York for their articulate opposition to the measure. He said: "I, as one senator at least on the other side of the issue, throw in the towel, eat a little crow, and declare my willingness to escape from a previous position."

More subtly and gradually, many members underwent a similar change of heart on tax reform. In the mid-1980s, Reagan had talked about making the revenue system so simple that people could file their returns on a postcard. Had such a radical change passed, lawmakers would have lost clout. By writing tax preferences into the statute books, members of Congress can influence every aspect of American life, as well as attract campaign contributions to their own coffers. Though the 1986 tax bill closed some loopholes, it fell far short of Reagan's ideal — and subsequent legislation has added further complexity. In the age of surpluses, Democratic and Republican lawmakers alike are talking about putting even more preferences into the tax code.

Congress's power of the purse is very much alive. And more purse means more power.

Stewardship

IT IS USEFUL TO THINK of institutional leaders as stewards. In the New Testament parable, the good stewards are those who put their employer's resources to work so they increase the sums with which he has entrusted them. The bad steward is the one who does nothing with his portion. In this vein, we can see that good leaders leave their institutions stronger than when the citizens granted them charge. Bad ones do not.

Clinton's stewardship invites harsh judgment. The actions that led to his impeachment were not mere personal misdeeds, but lasting stains on the presidency. For years to come, no matter who the incumbent may be, any photograph of the Oval Office will call to mind Clinton and Monica Lewinsky as well as more dignified moments. Any future president who asks for the people's trust must grapple with the memory of a president who betrayed it. Years ago, serious people would never have wondered whether the president would launch a military attack to distract attention from his behavior. But such speculation followed the 1998 strike on a Sudanese pharmaceutical factory, and subsequent reporting has only added to the suspicion. Thanks to Clinton, we will keep hearing about "Wag the Dog" scenarios in succeeding administrations.

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Clinton damaged the institution in much more concrete ways. In the course of the scandals, he tried to protect his personal interests by invoking executive privilege, attorney-client privilege, and the confidentiality of the Secret Service. His predecessors had tried to keep such issues out of court, for fear of setting adverse precedents. C. Boyden Gray, White House counsel for President Bush, explained to *Newsday*: "When you litigate something and lose it, you've lost it." Clinton litigated and lost, fumbling away legal protections that could have shielded later presidents.

His defenders assert that he protected his office by beating back a "politically motivated" impeachment, thereby deterring future lawmakers from going after his successors. Perhaps. Members of Congress will certainly hesitate to pursue charges originating in sexual misconduct. But suppose that the next big scandal involves money or the abuse of power. The president's foes will then be able to say: "This is no affair involving an intern. This is serious business." Just as Watergate made the Lewinsky scandal look less significant by comparison, the Lewinsky scandal will make the next one look weightier. If Nixon raised the bar on impeachment, Clinton may have lowered it.

A weakened executive does not necessarily mean a strengthened legislature.

In one sense, Clinton did establish precedents that may bolster presidential power. Through a variety of executive orders on everything from conservation to health care, he stretched his authority and circumvented Congress. Even here, however, he may end up kindling a reaction that restrains future presidents. For the first time in years, lawmakers are seriously discussing legislation to limit the use of executive orders.

A weakened executive does not necessarily mean a strengthened legislature. So what of the Republicans' stewardship of Congress? Here the picture is less clear, owing to the short-term political circumstances mentioned earlier. Still, the institution seems to be in reasonably good shape.

Perhaps the Republicans' biggest innovation came as soon as they organized the House in 1995 and set six-year term limits for committee chairs. The limits have had their critics. "It would be kind of silly to take the lead dogs and throw them out," Don Young, chairman of the Resources Committee, told the *Washington Post* in 1998. "There's an awful lot of institutional knowledge, and good chairmen should stay." Others argue that term limits weaken the committees in dealings with the executive branch by pitting greenhorn chairs against grizzled veterans of the bureaucracy. There is merit to this argument. In another way, however, term limits can actually energize the House by forcing the committee chairs to act with greater dispatch. In his excellent study of the 1997 budget agreement, Daniel J. Palazzolo notes that Budget Chairman John Kasich and Ways and Means Chairman Bill Archer both felt a sense of urgency to achieve a balanced bud-

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get before they had to pass the gavel to somebody else. "I have four years, and you have four years," Archer reportedly told the president in 1997.

In another institutional reform, Republicans also cut back on congressional staff (though much more deeply in the House than the Senate). Some have blamed Republican bumbling on these cutbacks, claiming they allowed the better-staffed executive branch to outgun the GOP in policy disputes. It is more likely, though, that GOP mistakes resulted from the members' own inexperience with majority status. Staff can actually hurt more than help. Walter Mondale, former vice president and senator from Minnesota, once told a committee on congressional reform: "Bright, hard-working staff inevitably create new demands and new work for a member of Congress. Some of it is necessary and valuable; much of it is not. Staff begins to drive a congressman's schedule and range of interests in ways that do not support the central tasks of his office."

Some might claim that both Congress and the presidency have jointly weakened themselves by devolving so much power to the states and localities. This claim does not hold up. Apart from the 1996 welfare reform bill, it is hard to identify many instances of serious devolution. If anything, Republicans have tried to increase Washington's authority, in areas ranging from euthanasia to product liability, while Democrats have done the same on health and education. Sen. George Voinovich, Ohio Republican, came to Washington with long experience in local and state government, including two terms as governor of his state. Last fall, he complained to the *Washington Post*: "Everybody up here is constantly saying we should send power out of Washington, but we hardly ever do. I keep trying to get that across to people. It's just impossible to get anyone to listen."

The millennial balance

THE RISE OF PRESIDENTIAL POWER coincided with what Michael Barone calls "big-unit society," where big government could achieve results by making deals with big business and big labor. Whenever the president appeared on the three big broadcast networks, he could command attention from a huge fraction of the public because there literally was nothing else to watch. In today's "small-unit society," things are tougher for a chief executive. Interests are more numerous and complicated, and it has become nearly impossible to summon the whole country to the national fireside when cable and VCRs give them other choices. Whereas more than half of American households would watch a state of the union address by Richard Nixon, less than a third would watch one by Bill Clinton (though the great length of the latter's was probably a deterrent too).

In an article 20 years ago in *The Futurist*, a junior House member and his wife looked ahead to how these trends would affect Congress. The new era

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"is shifting power and influence away from the executive branch, toward the legislative branch. Increased rates of change combined with growing decentralization of society and an information explosion will put strains on all elected officials, but will put those closest to the citizen — the legislator — at an advantage. Because of their closeness . . . legislators are better able to recognize and evaluate the changes taking place." The authors were Newt and Marianne Gingrich. In the past couple of years, the congressional majority has had its share of difficulty, resulting in part from the former speaker's own problems. But personalities should not obscure genuine insight.

Before going too far afield in Gingrichian speculation, we should recognize that certain events could upset our assumptions. Economic reversals could wipe out the surplus, requiring fiscal austerity that could again crimp Congress's style. And of course, a new military conflict might rejuvenate executive power. That possibility seems remote at the moment, but we ought to remember what George F. Will once said: "When at peace the nation should always assume that it may be living in what subsequent historians will call 'interwar years.' "

Still, if the years ahead bring generally good news, political change should remain on track. For most of the nineteenth century, Congress dominated the federal government. For most of the twentieth century the initiative passed to the White House. As the twenty-first century begins, the balance is shifting back.

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Smoke, Fire, and What to Do in Asia

By ASHLEY J. TELLIS

IT IS BY NOW widely acknowledged that the Asia-Pacific region is poised to become the new center of gravity in international politics in the twenty-first century. This transformation is truly momentous. For most of the modern era, the continent has subsisted mainly as an arena for Western exploitation and dominance — as the "object" rather than as the "subject" of power. Not only Asia's political order, but oftentimes even the region's eidetic image of itself has been a product of the acts and beliefs of others.

Clearly, this was not always the case. Prior to modernity — which for practical purposes might be dated to 1492 — and right through its early stages, the Asian continent hosted perhaps the most important concentrations of political power since the fall of Rome. These centers of power — the Ming dynasty in China, the Mughal empire in India, and the Persian Empire in the Near East — nonetheless failed to survive military contacts with the new rising states of Europe (and, later, the Americas). This failure, whose reasons are still debated in the scholarly literature, resulted in the demise of Asia as an autonomous international agent, a situation which more or less persisted until the end of World War II.

In the second half of the twentieth century, however, Asian economic power dramatically resurged, and with it the gradual emergence of significant Asian power centers in international politics. These new powers, like Japan, China, and India, have acquired large conventional military capabilities and, in the latter two cases, weapons of mass destruction (WMD) as well. In addition, several other Asian countries — Pakistan, North Korea, Israel, Iran, Iraq, and Syria — either possess different kinds of weapons of mass

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destruction or are proceeding to acquire them. Their successes and failures will influence a second and perhaps more consequential wave of proliferation over time as countries that have currently forgone WMD, like Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, and Australia, are forced to revisit their current policy choices.

By now, the likelihood of the further spread of these technologies has become a matter of great concern. What makes this concern more acute is that the growing attractiveness of weapons of mass destruction in Asia has materialized amidst continuing regional suspicions and animosities, varying degrees of distrust of the United States, and gradual changes in the regional balance of power.

The second nuclear age will in all probability turn out to be riskier than the first.

All these issues provide a rich backdrop for an interesting recent book by Paul Bracken, *Fire in the East: The Rise of Asian Military Power and the Second Nuclear Age* (HarperCollins, 1999), which seeks to describe the problem of WMD proliferation in Asia and its consequences for the United States. Bracken's message is clear and succinct: The second nuclear age will in all probability turn out to be riskier than the first. While the United States is by no means weaker than it was in the first epoch, the growth of Asian military power, symbolized primarily (but not entirely) by the marriage of nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles, implies that the U.S. homeland and its bases abroad will be increasingly subjected to new kinds of threats. These threats will inevitably weaken American hegemony and circumscribe its freedom of action, first in Asia and perhaps, later on, over the globe.

While such a conclusion flows seamlessly from the evidence mustered by Bracken about the increasing Asian investments in "disruptive technologies" like ballistic and cruise missiles and nuclear, biological, and chemical weaponry, his point goes further still. The West in general, Bracken argues — and the United States in particular — risks missing the real consequences of the second nuclear age: not only that the old barriers of time, distance, and terrain have lost their meaning in the face of WMD-tipped missilery, but also that the technological superiority the U.S. relies upon to sustain its regional hegemony has also been neutered as a result of such capabilities in the hands of many potential foes. At the very least, therefore, the dispersal of disruptive technologies in Asia implies that the traditional American strategy of relying upon a small number of large fixed bases along the periphery — in order to sustain a forward deployed military — will turn out to be an increasingly costly way of sustaining U.S. preeminence in Asia.

The issues raised by such an argument for American defense planning are profound. To understand why, we must begin by returning to first principles: to explain, first, how Asia's economic rise and consequent patterns of milita-

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rization were created by the success of U.S. grand strategy during the Cold War; and next to explore how the United States might respond to this dispersal of disruptive technologies in light of enduring American interests in the region.

The Asian miracle revisited

THREE FACTORS in the postwar period laid the basis for the resurgence of at least parts of Asia and, by implication, the spread of weapons of mass destruction. The first factor was simply the demise of the colonial order. By resulting in the birth of dozens of new states, that demise created the possibility of new autonomous centers in international politics outside of Europe and the Americas. As part of this process, several large entities, like China, India, and Indonesia, were either restored to independent status or reincarnated in modern form. Thus was the stage set for a rekindling of nationalism throughout the continent.

Yet while the demise of colonialism made the rise of Asia possible, what made that same rise inevitable were two other factors: the international order created and sustained by American preeminence in the postwar period, and the presence of national elites in some Asian countries embarking on specific national economic strategies that would produce sustained growth over time. Where these two factors did not obtain — in Southwest Asia and, to a lesser degree, in South Asia — the pressures of local security competition ensured that the regional states would seek to increase their security, power, and influence by other than economic means. This, in turn, inevitably meant weapons of mass destruction; for the other strategic alternatives, like advanced and effective conventional forces, turned out to be highly costly and difficult to obtain, the more so for governments in which poor economic performance and ineffective national leadership were the rule.

In general, though, those sub-regions of Asia that were able to avoid the temptations of disruptive technologies were those that secured the full fruits of American regional hegemony. This hegemony, in fact, provided two complementary benefits — opportunities for wealth and assured security — which increased the national power capabilities of several states to produce various kinds of critical technologies, even as it simply obviated the need for acquiring any disruptive technologies on the part of these states, at least in the near term.

To begin with, U.S. regional hegemony offered a structured opportunity for a variety of nations — war-torn states like Japan, smaller countries like South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, even late industrializers like China — to benefit from a stable and open international trading regime. The relatively unfettered access enjoyed by these states to the international market, especially the gigantic consuming economies of North America and Western

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Europe, provided them an opportunity to specialize in accordance with their relative advantages (and thereby to secure all the gains from trade that liberal economists have written about since the days of David Ricardo). In fact, the effective gains that accrued to these Asian states in the postwar period were even larger than the standard neoclassical models of free trade would have predicted. This was because the United States, confident about its preeminent economic power in the early postwar period, chose not to institute a truly "free" trade system. Rather, Washington opened its own markets to various Asian products without insisting on a symmetrical openness on the part of Asian exporters.

This strategy was essentially driven by power-political considerations associated with the Cold War. The fierce competition during this period, along with the thin margins of safety that the Western allies were seen to possess, convinced Washington that strengthening the economic capabilities of its Asian allies and the neutral states in the international system was in America's larger interests. Toward that end, a large international aid program, coupled with the development of a less-than-perfectly-free trading system, turned out to be a useful solution. It enabled the allies to reinvigorate their capabilities and thereby contribute to the American-led effort at joint resistance of the Soviet Union, while allowing the neutral states to strengthen themselves sufficiently to resist both Soviet lures and potential penetration efforts that might be mounted by Moscow.

Washington opened its markets to various Asian products without insisting on a symmetrical openness.

While this somewhat asymmetrical international economic order was hardly the kind of global institutional structure that would have satisfied a classical liberal, it did provide the United States with a cost-effective means of containing the Soviet Union. It rapidly strengthened the allied and neutral states, thus minimizing the need for nuclear weapons, at least on the part of the former, even as it allowed them to garner significant increases in economic power and conventional military strength under American alliance management. These twin consequences had the effect of denying Moscow the opportunity of preying upon the relatively weak and vulnerable nations of Asia, while simultaneously enlarging the domain of power and influence enjoyed by the United States.

This strategy of encouraging the Asian states, among others, to participate in, and perhaps even exploit, the liberal international economic order was of course not embarked upon for altruistic reasons. Washington's calculations were aimed at preserving and maintaining American preeminence. For this reason, the open international trading order was complemented by the institution of an international political order as well. This political order was

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built on the foundations of multilateral security alliances in Europe and an interlocking network of bilateral alliances in Asia. In both cases, the object of these alliances was the same, at least in the first instance: to contain the Soviet Union (and, initially, China as well) and to preserve Western security and autonomy. In the final instance, however, this alliance system had other equally useful effects. By providing an overarching defensive umbrella, the alliance structure served both to obviate destructive local security competition between the protected states (the bane of regional politics for the past several centuries) as well as to prevent these client entities from developing the kinds of disruptive technologies that could one day directly threaten the United States or its extended interests.

This lopsided security relationship was visible in its purest form in East Asia, where the United States committed itself to guaranteeing allied security without requiring the protected states to make any comparable commitments in return. Even those states that were not directly protected, like China, were shielded just the same, thanks to American deterrence of the Soviet Union. As a result of such arrangements, the U.S., in effect, provided the Asian states with guaranteed security *in tandem with* providing them the opportunities to procure significant gains from trade with minimal reciprocity, at least as far as comparable access to their own markets was concerned. The interaction of these two elements following the end of the colonial period would lay the foundations for creating an East Asian success story.

The United States committed itself to guaranteeing allied security without requiring any comparable commitments in return.

The possibility of profitably participating in the open trading regime, however, required something more than simply an international regime and the security structures that protected it. It required enlightened national elites in Asia itself — elites who not only would recognize the opportunities provided by the U.S.-led international order, but were also capable of developing the requisite domestic economic strategies that would help their states get the most out of their participation in the international economic system. Such elites were present along substantial portions of the East Asian periphery — in contrast to the general muddling that characterized the westerly peripheries of the continent.

The national elites in East Asia contributed to the economic miracle in three ways: first, by developing specific national economic strategies which allowed their states to maximize external benefits from the international trading order; second, by developing the appropriate national institutions that allowed for the possibility of constantly "shared growth" rather than repeated, divisive struggles over redistribution (see Jose Edgardo Campos

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and Hilton L. Root, *The Key to the Asian Miracle*, 1996); and third, by keeping defense expenditures low but nonetheless focusing on the mastery of key technologies that would allow them to lay the foundations for increased military power should that become necessary in the future. The national economic strategies devised by East Asia's ruling elites centered substantially on maintaining highly regulated domestic market structures — with American acquiescence — which penalized consumption in order to force higher rates of saving. These accumulated savings were then directed to make advantageous production of more sophisticated goods even more advantageous. As a result of this process, Asian economies that began their "export-led" growth strategies by producing highly labor-intensive goods — small and medium-scale light industries like garments, footwear, plastics, and toys — slowly shifted their attention and resources to produce the electronics, computers, and automobiles which are synonymous with East Asia today.

The decisions to keep defense expenditures as low as possible allowed the East Asian states to avoid security competition.

The structuring of national institutions to allow for "shared growth" reflected the corporatist approach to state-society relations that distinguishes many East Asian states from their Southwestern and South Asian as well as their Western counterparts. This approach, in effect, relied on the state (as a benign Leviathan) to institute procedural arrangements with critical groups in civil society, including big business. These arrangements, in turn, helped to integrate weaker but more numerous sections of the populace through the development of relatively stable institutions, rules, and procedures that both limited the capriciousness of the state in matters of economic policy and encouraged rapid private economic growth. As part of these structural arrangements, political liberties (in the Western sense) were often traded off for economic rewards; these rewards were distributed not in the form of simple, transitory entitlements, but rather in the more durable form of expanding avenues for mass upward mobility and the opportunities to reap long-term, lasting benefits from the resulting economic expansion.

Finally, the decisions to keep defense expenditures as low as possible allowed the East Asian states to avoid ruinous forms of destructive local security competition. These decisions, however, did not imply either a neglect of conventional military capabilities or an inattention to the key building blocks of modern military power. Instead, even as effective conventional forces were developed and subordinated to alliance interests, they also concentrated on mastering key technological processes that would allow them to develop a wide variety of effective disruptive technologies if they needed to over time.

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As long as an Asian state, therefore, had a rational and calculating political leadership and responsive economic institutions, its ability not only to survive but actually to thrive was almost a certainty under the international economic and political regimes created with the intent of maintaining American preeminence and checking Soviet influence.

Three problems, three sets of states

THE AMERICAN "GRAND STRATEGY" succeeded brilliantly, contributing to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the reinvigoration of U.S. allies and important neutral states. But it also produced other less desirable effects over time: the relative decline of American power, at least in comparison to the new growth centers in East Asia, coupled with the emergence of various other states — states which, lacking economic prowess and/or effective foreign allies, began to view the acquisition of disruptive technologies as critical to their national security.

By the end of the Cold War, U.S. grand strategy in Asia was therefore confronted by three sets of states. The first consisted of formal American allies, like Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Australia, which benefited greatly from both the liberal international economic order and American protection and as a result chose to forgo the option of developing weapons of mass destruction for ensuring their security. Each of these states used its close relations with the United States to build up fairly formidable conventional military forces, which however relied upon the U.S. nuclear umbrella for strategic cover. The second set of states consisted of powers like China, India, and Pakistan, which chose to develop weapons of mass destruction in order to resolve local security dilemmas. As late entrants into the liberal international economic order, they were not able to scale the heights of prosperity as countries in the first set did. And not being real allies of either superpower, they found in weapons of mass destruction an attractive solution to their immediate security threats, for neither prosperity nor alliances alone were viewed as sufficient. The third set of states, like North Korea, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, turned out to be those that missed the economic revolution occurring in other parts of Asia entirely (though for different reasons in each case). Unable to develop either effective political or conventional military solutions to their immediate security problems, these states settled on the acquisition of disruptive technologies as the preferred instruments for generating security and influence.

This demarcation clearly suggests how the spread of disruptive technologies in Asia has been affected by the reach and success of American grand strategy during the Cold War. Clearly, had this strategy failed, it is likely that many more Asian states would have opted for weapons of mass destruction — including very rich and capable states like Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Australia. In fact, some of these countries actually toyed with the idea of

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developing nuclear weapons during the Cold War, and all of them currently possess the technical and economic wherewithal to produce various kinds of disruptive technologies fairly quickly should they choose to do so.

Unfortunately, the benefits of U.S. protection — which were so conspicuously manifest in East Asia — did not extend throughout the continent. In part, this was because coping with the communist threat was so pressing a challenge that any effort to extend U.S. deterrence guarantees to counter even local security competition in Asia would have led to an unacceptable, perhaps fatal, overextension of U.S. power. It was tried nonetheless — for example, through the CENTO and SEATO treaties — but these efforts failed mostly because many of the regional partners had national objectives that varied substantially from those of the United States. Whatever the reason for failure in each case, the net result was that many Asian states increasingly came to see their survival and national interests as dependent on the possession of weapons of mass destruction. In some cases, this dependence was less an issue of national survival than one of regime survival, but the outcome turned out to be the same.

Unfortunately, the benefits of U.S. protection did not extend throughout the continent.

The strategic challenge facing the United States from the perspective of managing disruptive technologies today, therefore, takes the form of a three-sided problem that must be resolved simultaneously: First, how can the states in the first category — Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Australia — be effectively defended against WMD threats so as to preempt them from acquiring comparable capabilities of their own over time? Second, how can the states in the second category — China, India, and Pakistan — be prevented from distending their WMD capabilities, even as their growing links with the liberal international economic order enable them to generate the resources to acquire additional disruptive technologies? Finally, how can the states in the third category — North Korea, Iran, Iraq, and Syria — be weaned away from their addiction to disruptive technologies at a time when they perceive unchallenged American hegemony to be among the principal threats to their security?

Unfortunately, there are no simple solutions here. One can argue, for example, that manipulating, even constraining, access to the U.S.-led liberal international economic order could help to constrain neutral and antagonistic proliferants: i.e., that constraining the economic growth of states in the second and third categories will restrain by implication their ability to invest extensively in disruptive technologies. The success of this solution, however, is contingent on how integrated such states are with the global economy. Some states like China are highly integrated, others like India and Pakistan less so, and still others like North Korea and Syria are virtually unconnected. Thus, even if constraining growth rates could work as a solution in some

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cases, this instrument may not be optimal after all for several reasons. First, disruptive technologies are relatively cheap to acquire compared to other kinds of strategic technologies, so it is not clear that reducing the overall growth rates even in those countries that are integrated into the global market would make a big difference to their WMD programs (obviously, countries that are not so integrated are exempt from such pressures to begin with). Second, any kind of manipulation of access to the liberal economic order not only penalizes U.S. economic interests and reduces the gains accruing to American consumers, but also violates the core premises underlying the creation and perpetuation of the liberal order that has served both the U.S. and its allies well over time. Finally, the policy of economic constraint reduces whatever pacifying benefits do obtain from the spread of trade and commerce in goods and ideas; it undermines the viability of both those domestic constituencies in the proliferant countries that have a stake in greater international integration (as opposed to narrowly nationalistic ambitions) *and* those ideas which affirm the belief that competition for absolute gains is preferable to self-defeating struggles about relative gains. At the very least, therefore, the unwillingness (and perhaps inability) of the United States to manipulate access to international markets for some or all these reasons implies a geopolitical fact: Whether countries grow rapidly or slowly, some kinds of economic instruments may be relatively inefficient to prevent the further diffusion of disruptive technologies.

The policy of economic constraint reduces whatever pacifying benefits do obtain from the spread of trade and commerce in goods and ideas.

All that may be left in the tool kit, then, as Bracken notes with dismay in *Fire in the East*, are the standard instruments of technology denial, focused economic sanctions, arms control, and the like. Despite their historical shortcomings, these do turn out to be the only generic instruments left, particularly if more aggressive and risky options like preventative war or disarming strikes are ruled out as either inappropriate or infeasible in all but a very few cases.

This reality is understandably disconcerting to most strategic analysts, and Bracken's book is no exception. How one copes with the problem of WMD diffusion remains the weakest part of his otherwise lucid work. But his core observation about the consequences of the militarization of Asia is important and bears careful reflection: The gradual diffusion of WMD instruments does indeed imply that significant portions of the Asian continent will gradually become immune to the easy application of U.S. military power. The very presence of WMD, especially in the nuclear variant, implies that American hegemony, however potent otherwise, cannot be directed

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against the core interests of any proliferant without provoking a highly damaging response. In effect, then, as Bracken notes, the diffusion of disruptive technologies implies the progressive diminution of American hegemony as new portions of the Asian strategic landscape become immune to the persuasion embodied by U.S. military power.

In this judgement, Bracken is correct. But this only makes American hegemony more and more akin to the British hegemony of a previous era. The most conspicuous characteristic of British hegemony, unlike that of Rome, was Great Britain's general inability to dominate the heartlands of its principal competitors. In fact, this inability is precisely what drove Great Britain from the metropolitan center of Europe and compelled it to create an empire built around the domination of mostly peripheral states. Even at the height of British hegemony, the European continent remained more or less beyond the easy reach of English arms. To the degree that U.S. power is forced in a similar direction in the future, it is likely to simply replicate what *must* be the future of all hegemonies in the nuclear age. In fact, it is possible to argue that the United States is no stranger to this phenomenon at all, since even in the first nuclear age — the Cold War — U.S. military power could not be applied with impunity against the Soviet heartland or within the sphere of acknowledged Soviet influence.

Even at the height of British hegemony, the continent remained beyond the easy reach of English arms.

With the growing militarization of Asia, this immunity will now extend to new pockets of the continent. While the progressive expansion of such a sanctuary no doubt implies a further constriction of U.S. freedom of action, it is important not to overstate this implication. After all, American military power, like British military power before it, is unlikely to be directed ordinarily against the *core* interests of any emerging competitors. Rather, most applications of U.S. military power, as far as can be envisaged, are likely to be directed either at the interstices of competing interests or in defense of some long-established (and by now well-recognized) security obligations in Asia. With the exception of defending Taiwan, which China has for its own reasons defined as a core interest, almost every other application of U.S. power that can be imagined is oriented towards defending objectives that are only extrinsically rather than intrinsically valuable from the viewpoint of emerging proliferators. Thus, the U.S. could wage war against Iraq to recapture Kuwait; can contemplate the defense of South Korea against the North; and can patrol the sea lanes in the Gulf in the face of Iranian hostility, because in the final analysis neither Kuwait nor South Korea nor evicting U.S. naval presence in the Gulf could be considered to be intrinsically valuable interests from the viewpoint of Baghdad, Pyongyang, and Tehran respectively.

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If, in fact, a different valuation of these interests obtained in these three capitals, then the United States would be faced with a situation of "absolute" conflict, like Great Britain was during the two earlier world wars, during which it would have no choice but to press every resource it had under its command to win the war — including nuclear war — that would be forced upon it *if deterrence failed.* A situation like this could of course occur in the future if the United States, for example, attempted to enforce its writ in a way that ran counter to the recognized core interests of any nuclear-armed adversary. Such exercises of armed suasion, however, are unlikely — or at least would be avoided in favor of some other alternative. The American responses to North Korean nuclearization more or less confirmed this approach, but even if local wars were to materialize, the relative — even though not absolute — superiority enjoyed by the United States in multiple dimensions of power would make a *real* difference to its ability to minimize all the tactical, operational, strategic, and geopolitical hardships that would flow out of an adversary's decisions to use his disruptive technologies against the United States. This implies that even if U.S. freedom of action gradually diminishes in Asia because of the gradual diffusion of weapons of mass destruction, it still pays Washington to play the role of a hegemonic supplier of security to those Asian states threatened by this phenomenon so long as such a strategic relationship enables the kinds of productive economic relations that over time help to defray the burdens of providing security *and* help to preempt the rise of even more significant and consequential threats to U.S. interests in the future.

When viewed from amidst the spectrum of possibilities, the United States therefore may have little choice but to maintain its preeminent power in Asia — through forward deployment if necessary. The other alternatives — encouraging a multipolarity in the hope of generating a stabilizing local balance of power, or more or less disengaging from the region in order to minimize the threats to its interests — leave Washington worse off in comparison to all the inconveniences that must necessarily be suffered as a result of the commitment to sustain U.S. regional preeminence. This is the critical question that lies at the heart of any debate about America's future in Asia: Once this grand strategic issue is resolved, the derivative problems about what operational adjustments in the U.S. military posture ought to be engineered or what technical antidotes ought to be developed in order to cope with the growth of Asian military power can be resolved relatively simply.

The case for staying put

I BELIEVE THAT THE COMMITMENT to U.S. regional preeminence remains the best solution to our multiple national security interests in Asia. The relative merits of pursuing the maintenance of preeminence as a grand strategy — as opposed to settling for a local multipolar bal-

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ance of power or slowly disengaging from the region — can be best demonstrated by testing the consequences of each of these alternatives against the multiple goals pursued by the United States in Asia.

The United States has, arguably, several critical interests in Asia. The list here is in decreasing order of importance:

The first critical interest consists of *preventing, deterring, and reducing the threat of attack on the continental United States and its extended territorial possessions.* In the simplest sense, this interest has two components. The first and most important involves preserving the continental United States (CONUS) and its possessions from threats posed by weapons of mass destruction in Asia. These weapons are important because of the extensive damage they can inflict in relatively compressed time frames. Equally important, as Bracken points out, are the challenges posed by sophisticated delivery systems, like ballistic and cruise missiles and advanced attack aircraft, currently deployed by the WMD-capable states as well as prospective delivery systems that may be acquired by other Asian states over time. This includes both spin-off technologies emerging from space and commercial aviation programs as well as other kinds of non-traditional, covert delivery systems.

Disengaging from Asia in any significant way does little to minimize the threats posed by the spread of WMD.

The other component of this national objective involves protecting the CONUS and its possessions from conventional attack. Because of the vast distances involved in the Asia-Pacific region, the critical variables here are battlespace denial and power-projection capabilities — both sea- and air-based — that may be acquired by one or more Asian states. Given the changes in technology, these capabilities must be expanded to include other, newer, approaches to conventional warfighting like strategic information warfare and the technologies and operational practices associated with the "revolution in military affairs." In all instances, U.S. interests suggest the following preference ordering: preventing potential adversaries from acquiring such capabilities; if prevention is impossible, deterring their use becomes the next logical objective; and, if even deterrence is unsuccessful, attenuating their worst effects through either extended counterforce options or effective defensive measures finally becomes necessary.

It is immediately obvious that disengaging from Asia in any significant way does little to minimize the threats posed by the spread of both WMD and other strategic technologies. Only if highly robust forms of strategic defense become available in the future does the disengagement option become viable, and even then it may not necessarily be preferable, if it implies the inability to influence the WMD procurement and deployment

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decisions of the Asian states. Disengagement, moreover, has other corrosive effects: It would certainly compel many current American allies to acquire disruptive technologies in order to compensate for American absence, and these responses would only generate a regional arms race that would lead to the further diffusion of such capabilities.

It is highly doubtful that encouraging a multipolar balance of power, requiring the controlled diffusion of WMD and strategic capabilities, is the solution either. There is simply no assurance that the "grooming" of multipolarity can be successfully calibrated (either by the United States or others). Moreover, once solutions such as these are pursued, there is no guarantee that other countries in other parts of the world will want to maintain any of their current restraints. A multipolarity based on the gradual emergence of new WMD powers may become a reality over time, but it cannot represent a future that the U.S. ought to desire or encourage, at least as a general principle. There may be areas where exceptions to this rule are tolerated, but such exceptionalism requires additional tests before it is enshrined as a matter of policy. In any event, when U.S. extended deterrence is available to a state, it ought to be offered in the form of security guarantees as a strategy of diminishing the attractiveness of disruptive technologies. In the matter of defending its first critical interest in Asia, therefore, a hegemonic strategy, whereby the U.S. continues to provide local security, remains the best strategy — not because it is by any means risk-free but because it is better than all the alternatives.

The second critical interest consists of *preventing the rise of a hegemonic state in Asia*. Any hegemonic state capable of dominating the Asian land mass and the line of communications, both internal and external, represents an unacceptable challenge to the safety, prosperity, and relative power position of the United States. For reasons well understood by geopoliticians since Sir Halford Mackinder, Asia's great wealth and resources would privilege its possessors considerably in the struggles endemic to international politics. If the region's wealth and resources were to be secured by any single state (or some combination of states acting in unison), it would enable this entity to threaten American assets not only in Asia but in other areas as well — Europe and Africa, for example — and finally perhaps to challenge the United States itself at a global level. This entity, using the continent's vast resources and economic capabilities, could then effectively interdict the links that currently connect the United States with Asia and the rest of the world and, in the limiting case, menace the U.S. territory itself through a combination of both WMD and conventional instruments.

Besides being a threat to American safety, a hegemonic domination of Asia by one of the region's powers would threaten American prosperity as well, if the consequence of such domination included denying the United States access to the continent's markets, goods, capital, and technology. In combination, this threat to American safety and prosperity would have the inevitable effect of threatening the relative power position of the United

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States in international politics.

This interest in preventing the rise of a hegemonic state inevitably involves paying close attention to the possible power transitions currently occurring in the region, especially those relating to China in the near to medium term and to Japan, Russia, and possibly India over the long run. It requires developing an appropriate set of policy responses — which may range from prevention at one end through containment in the middle to appeasement at the other — designed to prevent the rise of any hegemony that breaks American connections with Asia. Plainly, a strategy of disengagement would be unable to assure this objective, and may actually entice the larger Asian states to contemplate mounting just such a challenge. Even if such efforts were to arouse local balancing, there is no assurance that they could be checkmated without the assistance of the United States. And, if such balancing ultimately requires U.S. military presence and assistance for its success, it is still not clear what the benefits of a multipolar solution would be since the current division of labor already accepts not only American presence but also American preeminence. This is not to say that further adjustments in the U.S. regional posture ought to be ruled out, but that any adjustments that presage a true devolution towards multipolarity — the spread of WMD capabilities to American allies and acquiescing to their acquisition of power projection capabilities — have not yet been shown to be in the U.S. interest.

The third critical interest consists of *ensuring the survival of American allies*. The first and most obvious reason for this objective is that the United States has treaty obligations to three important Asian states — Japan, South Korea, and Australia — and political commitments to another, namely Taiwan. While meeting these obligations is certainly important to maintain the credibility of the United States in the international arena, it is also consequential for directly substantive reasons that go right to the heart of Bracken's book: controlling the leakage of disruptive technologies in Asia.

In at least two of these three instances, the assurance of U.S. protection has resulted in important implicit bargains that are indispensable to the American conception of stable international order. Thanks to American security guarantees, South Korea and Japan have both enjoyed the luxury of eschewing nuclear weapons as guarantors of security. Should American protective pledges be seen as weakening, the temptation to resurrect the nuclear option on the part of both states will increase — to the consequent detriment of America's *global* antiproliferation policy. Equally significant, however, is that Japan, and possibly South Korea as well, would of necessity have to embark on a significant conventional buildup, especially of missile, maritime and air forces. The resulting force posture would in practice be indistinguishable from a long-range power projection capability possessing an offensive orientation. Even if such forces are developed primarily for defensive purposes, they will certainly give rise to new security dilemmas region-wide — which, in turn, would lead to an intense arms race, growing suspicions, and possibly war.

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Finally, even the least troublesome of these possibilities would result in the destruction of the East Asian zone of prosperity. While such an outcome would certainly affect the strategic prospects of the East Asian region, the United States would not by any means be immune to its extended consequences. Since a considerable portion of American growth is directly tied to the vitality of the international trading system in general and this region in particular, the enervation of the East Asian economic regime would eventually lead to a diminution of American growth rates and, by implication, the quality of life enjoyed by its citizenry. For all these reasons, ensuring the survival of American allies in Asia through a continuation of the current guarantees represents a vital interest to the United States grounded not in altruistic considerations but in the hard realities of self-interest.

Neither disengagement nor multipolarity would allow the United States to discharge its obligations effectively.

Neither disengagement nor multipolarity would allow the United States to discharge its obligations to its allies effectively. The latter alternative would change the character of those obligations entirely, and it is far from obvious that a truly multipolar system — which brings in its trail problems like buck-passing, increased coordination costs, and enhanced uncertainty about allied intentions and objective — would actually be an improvement over the current arrangements in the realm of security. Neither of these two solutions fares well in the realm of economics, either. U.S. disengagement could lead quickly to the destruction of regional free trade practices, since such practices could hardly survive, let alone thrive, in the face of acute security competition. More likely, the current trading order would quickly evolve into relatively closed trading blocs, with each regional pole attempting to derive whatever benefits it could from open trading among its own allies while simultaneously seeking to deny such benefits to its major competitors.

The fourth critical American interest in Asia is *sustaining the political stability of key regional countries and promoting democratization whenever possible*. There is a compelling argument to be made for focusing American attention, resources, and support on a few "pivotal states," rather than on whole swaths of territory indiscriminately. Pivotal states, as Robert S. Chase defined them in "Pivotal States and U.S. Strategy" in the January/February 1996 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, are those "whose fate is uncertain and whose future will profoundly affect their surrounding regions." By this definition, it is clear that the Asian continent already hosts the largest number of pivotal states. These would include Russia, China, and Japan among the more developed countries and India, Pakistan, and Indonesia among the developing tier. Those in the former category are important for obvious reasons:

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Russia continues to be a nuclear power of consequence; China is a rising state that not only possesses nuclear weapons but will probably be the world's largest economic power sometime in the next century; and Japan is not only an American ally but a significant trading state, the center for technological innovation in Asia, and the fulcrum for any policy of effectively managing a rising China.

The developing pivotal states are important for less well understood reasons. Pakistan and India are both nuclear capable states: While the former may affect the global balance if only by collapsing, the latter stands poised to become the world's fourth largest economy early in the next century. Indonesia is not only a large and populous state whose stability is linked to the fate of all of Southeast Asia, but it also lies astride the choke points controlling transit from the oil-rich Southwest Asian states to the energy-hungry economies of East Asia. Every one of these states — in both categories — faces an uncertain future, yet each is in different ways "so important regionally that its collapse would spell trans-boundary mayhem" on one hand, while "its progress and stability would bolster its region's economic vitality and political soundness" on the other, as Chase writes.

The issue of promoting democratization both in these states and outside them remains dear to the United States. This objective cannot be effectively pursued, however, if U.S. geopolitical preeminence or its regional presence steadily erode or if the United States settles for grand strategies that acquiesce in the rise of genuine peer competitors. As Samuel P. Huntington argued a long time ago, the robustness of American power clearly conditions the ability of the United States to achieve what might sometimes be considered as derivative objectives with respect to American security: democratization, human rights, and the rule of law. An America that either disengaged from Asia or was reduced to becoming just another power within it would inexorably lose its ability to influence any change with respect to these issues throughout Asia. It would have to settle for rhetorical flourishes as a substitute for policy.

Of prevention, carrots, and sticks

THE MULTIFACETED NATURE of these interests — preserving the safety of the U.S. homeland and that of its allies, preserving the liberal economic order in Asia on which American prosperity is increasingly dependent, and preserving the possibilities of an Asian democratic zone of peace — suggests that the problem of the diffusion of disruptive technologies in Asia represents just one subset of the much larger challenge of maintaining good regional order. U.S. regional policy, thus far, has been appreciative of this fact. The analysis above suggests why the larger grand strategy of maintaining U.S. primacy — as encoded, for example, in successive versions of the Pentagon's *East Asia Strategic Initiative* — offers the best

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possibilities for meeting the challenges posed by the spread of disruptive technologies while simultaneously satisfying the other economic, strategic, and political demands made on U.S. presence.

Since this presence will continue to rely on a forward posture — which remains the best solution despite all the threats posed to it — the real task facing policy makers consists of mitigating the threats to that posture.

First and foremost is the issue of what can be done preventively. Most U.S. efforts thus far have focused on the tactical level, which consists of creating a variety of global regimes aimed at denying critical technologies to emerging proliferators. Much can be done to further tighten the multilateral controls that the U.S. has attempted to maintain since the beginning of the Cold War.

Yet though such efforts are under way (and have been for a while), the critical challenges at the strategic level have not been addressed effectively. These challenges emerge principally from the fact that many of the great powers, who are nominally part of the antiproliferation regime, have increasingly found it in their self-interest to assist the diffusion of disruptive technologies to emerging proliferators for their own strategic ends. Sometimes such assistance is driven by economic pressures, and it is unfortunate that despite much research on this question — for example, see the suggestions in the 1994 RAND report by Kenneth Watman et al., "Controlling Conventional Arms Transfers" — United States has been unable to craft a better policy that integrates some "carrots" into a tool kit which otherwise consists mostly of sticks.

More important, however, the diffusion of disruptive technologies by various great powers is often sensitive to the exercise of U.S. hegemony: There is, in many cases, a clear correlation between U.S. policies that are perceived to be insensitive or hostile by the other great powers, and their willingness to transfer disruptive technologies to emerging proliferators. In some cases, there is little the United States can do to avoid such responses, but in many other instances there is much: Thus far, unfortunately, the U.S. has not demonstrated the kind of sensitivity that key suppliers — Russia, for example — would demand. The unipolar moment would be squandered if the United States succeeded in convincing other competitors, by means of ill-considered policies, that they had no choice but to "get even" with this overbearing power either by direct opposition or by strategies based on subterfuge.

The bottom line is that if the emerging proliferators were the *sole* problem, they could be dealt with rather easily on their own terms: The current tactics centered on various forms of technology denial would be quite effective, not necessarily at "total" prevention but at least to buy the requisite time to develop political, technical, and operational antidotes necessary for coping with these relatively localized problems. Coping with the threat posed by other great powers who choose to assist the diffusion of disruptive technologies is another matter altogether. It is this dimension of prevention

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that, being most difficult and often becoming competitive with other U.S. grand strategic interests, has received inadequate attention. To the degree that the U.S. either cannot or will not be solicitous of the core grand strategic interests of these states, preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction is only likely to fail further.

Second, because U.S. efforts to prevent the further diffusion of disruptive technologies are likely to be less than successful in many instances, the principal fallback objective must be deterrence. This is in fact the strategy that the U.S. successfully employed throughout the Cold War, and there is little reason to think it could not work again. Countries that acquire disruptive technologies will not necessarily use them. In many instances, the capabilities of emerging proliferators are still relatively small. Therefore, however effective the presence of disruptive technologies may be from the point of levying threats, they could be quite unusable as warfighting instruments, particularly if these bluffs are actually called by superior powers like the United States.

Countries that acquire disruptive technologies will not necessarily use them.

It must be remembered that most state managers in Asia who preside over various inventories of disruptive technologies value these small assets precisely because they are the "crown jewels" that help to cement their political control, within the state or the region or both. They are simply unlikely to risk these assets by entering into unwinnable contests with superior adversaries, especially over issues that are at best extrinsically valuable. Consequently, so long as their own local power and survival are unchallenged, actual use of their disruptive technologies can be deterred, even in the context of a localized war involving such states. How exactly such deterrence ought to be cemented here remains an open issue. Though the United States continues to enjoy unparalleled "escalation dominance" at a technical level, thanks to the size, diversity, and sophistication of its nuclear arsenal, there remains the question of how these capabilities ought to be used if deterrence fails in the context of a regional dispute. The role of future U.S. nuclear doctrine and the possibility of dealing with limited WMD use through conventional forms of retaliation alone — as was considered for example during the Gulf War — are still unresolved policy questions.

Finally, because deterrence could fail in some circumstances, the United States has spent a great deal of time and attention on issues of defense. Broadly speaking, the challenges of defense can be broken down into two sets of problems. First, how can the United States defend its homeland in the context of threats emerging as a result of distant localized disputes? Solutions to this problem converge in one way or another around strategic defense, understood as a thin bubble of protection over both the continental United States and the territories of its principal allies. A derivative solution

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here also includes preparing for homeland defense against catastrophic terrorism. The main problems here today are still technical feasibility and bureaucratic inefficiency, though it is likely that both could be resolved so as to assure a satisfactory defense against (essentially) "limited" attacks.

The second problem may be phrased as follows: How can the United States defend its forward operating assets in the context of immediate threats arising out of militarized disputes in the theater? The principal challenge implicit here — which Bracken rightly identifies — is this: Though a forward presence is essential, if the grand strategy of regional preeminence is to be sustained, it cannot be a static presence as it was in the past.

The good news is that all the nation's armed services recognize this problem. The bad news is that R&D, acquisitions, and funding programs have not always cohered with this insight. In essence, the reach of American tactical warfighting assets, especially aircraft, is becoming shorter and shorter, even as the fixed forward facilities that are necessary to sustain these capabilities are under greater and greater threat. This is true, for example, even of naval aviation, whose strike fighters today have shorter legs than those possessed during the Cold War. The consequence, therefore, will be increased efforts at defending U.S. fixed bases along the rim lands against WMD threats in order to allow our short-legged tactical assets to operate effectively. While preparing for operations in a WMD environment is no doubt important, unless other solutions — like increasing the size and capability of the U.S. bomber force and inducting long-range stealth attack capabilities into naval aviation — are progressively invested in, the United States military will be ill-prepared for operations in the face of the new disruptive technologies surfacing in Asia.

Strategic déjà vu

As BRACKEN POINTS OUT in *Fire in the East*, such efforts will no doubt be expensive and cumbersome. But such is the price that the United States must pay in order to maintain its regional preeminence — and one it ought to be willing to pay, given that all the alternatives to preeminence are fraught with even higher costs.

In one sense, the United States is no stranger to this situation. During the Cold War, Washington mustered the resolve and the resources to develop the requisite capabilities that enabled it to stay securely ensconced in the European promontory, despite all the threats posed by the large inventory of disruptive technologies possessed by the Soviet Union. At that moment in time, Europe was the great prize, and defending it through the assertion of American power was judged to be preferable to either disengagement or the nurturing of a regional multipolarity which would justify U.S. retrenchment or offshore balancing.

The situation in Asia today is much the same. The Asian continent will

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become the great geopolitical prize, if it has not already; and the United States will be confronted with the same grand strategic choices it once faced in Europe, if indeed it does not confront them yet. The key difference, of course, is that there is no Soviet Union in Asia — yet. That, however, could change. The best way to preempt such change (and to cope with it if it does materialize) is to preserve American regional preeminence in the form of potent forward deployed — and forward deployable — forces capable of dealing with contingencies ranging from local disruptions all the way to the rise of a peer competitor.

This is no doubt the worst strategy imaginable, except for all the others. Fortunately, the U.S. already enjoys many advantages that make such a strategy quite sustainable: The Asian allies demand such a presence and have been willing historically to support it in both political and financial terms; both the current threats and those on the horizon, though nasty in absolute terms, are still puny in comparison to the Soviet challenge, which was itself mastered by the United States; and, finally, America continues to enjoy comprehensive power-political advantages — reflected in technological, financial, military, and ideological terms — that few of its current and emerging competitors, even with their unidimensional capabilities in disruptive technologies, can hope to match. Used wisely, these resources can douse the "fire in the East" and preserve American preeminence there — an outcome that wins on strategic points and utilitarian ones as well.

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From Yeltsin to Putin

Milestones on an Unfinished Journey

By ARIEL COHEN

BORIS YELTSIN'S PASSING FROM the world scene demonstrates once again how one man can change history. If not for Yeltsin, Russia today might still be ruled by the Soviet Communist Party, either in reformist or Stalinist incarnation. But Yeltsin only started the long and still unfinished business of reforming Russia. He has left much of the job to his hand-picked successor, Vladimir Putin, the steely-eyed former intelligence officer and ex-head of the Russian secret police who only a year ago was a complete unknown. It is now up to Putin to tackle the future of Russia and its centuries-old problem of integration into the West.

As the Soviet Union collapsed, the Russian reform-oriented elites led by Yeltsin attempted a political modernization that included the wholesale import of Western-style political machinery. The trappings of democracy installed in Russia included participatory elections, the creation of an office of the president, and the adoption of a constitution influenced by pre-revolutionary Russian political practice, the French Fifth Republic, and the United States. But as has been true since the time of Peter the Great, when Western practices are planted in Russian soil, they acquire uniquely Russian charac-

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teristics. Putin's presidency will inevitably be evaluated in the light of the successes (or failures) of the political and economic reforms started under Yeltsin and Gorbachev.

Putin's March 26, 2000 presidential bid wasn't quite a formally uncontested election of the kind that was a hallmark of the Soviet era, but it still presents a peculiarly Russian phenomenon — the election of a monarch. The wildly popular political novice Putin ran without a strong opponent, and at this writing looked to face no serious obstacles on his way to the presidency. After a "dirty tricks" campaign aimed against them, former Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov and Moscow's Mayor Yurii Luzhkov, both of whom appeared formidable only a year ago, opted not to enter the contest. The consensus in Moscow is that the young, ambitious, and focused Putin will be very much a hands-on leader, inheriting the legacy of the impetuous and autocratic Yeltsin.

Sorting out Yeltsin's past role and Putin's future rule is an important challenge for Western policy experts and politicians. It is also important to understand how Russia is really ruled, and not to be misled by those familiar Western terms: elections, parliament, president. We must see Russia for what it is — a huge country that has been stuck in what the Russians call "catch-up modernization" for the past 300 years, but does not really consider itself to be entirely a part of the West. As in the past, Russia today is ruled by elites who are willing to acquire Western goods and concepts, but do not fully identify with the West and often are envious of it. The world's ability to live with and next to Russia now hangs in the hands of Putin.

Yeltsin's ambiguous place in history

Like many Russian rulers before him, Yeltsin started out a reformer and wound up a retrograde. While he earlier defied the communist putschists, liberated prices, and launched a massive privatization, he later ended up presiding over the economic crash of August 1998 and the destruction of Chechnya. His resignation on the eve of New Year's 2000 concluded an era in Russian politics that began with Mikhail Gorbachev's ascent to power in 1985.

This was the era of dismantling communism, the centrally planned economy, and the Soviet multinational empire. By the time Yeltsin assumed office, Gorbachev had pulled most Soviet forces out of the external empire and had refrained from interfering when democrats toppled the communist governments in Eastern and Central Europe. In fact, Gorbachev reportedly encouraged the removal of the hard-line leadership of East Germany, led by Erich Honecker, and he had no kind words for the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceauçescu upon his demise.

In the Soviet Union itself, the Communist Party was utterly discredited. Graves containing the remains of hundreds of thousands of Stalin's victims

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were exhumed across 11 time zones, from Belarus to Eastern Siberia. Russians were disoriented and demoralized as the old order fell, but at the same time full of hope for a better future.

The Soviet Union itself was about to be transformed into a confederation when the August 1991 coup struck. The fiction of the "Soviet people — a new historic entity," as it was called under Brezhnev, had fallen apart. Ethnic conflicts raged between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Southern Caucasus. To save the internal Soviet empire, Gorbachev authorized the use of force against independence-minded leaders of the Baltic states and anti-communist nationalists in Georgia and Azerbaijan, but to no avail. War was about to erupt between the communist-leaning Slavs and Romanian-speaking nationalists in the Trans-Dniester part of Moldova.

Yeltsin accelerated Gorbachev's reforms, bringing about the dissolution of the Soviet Union and administering the coup de grâce to the iron rule of the Communist Party. He should also be credited for ushering in a working democratic political process, albeit in a rather inelegant fashion. After a few years, a new elite crystallized. It combined more advanced members of the communist-era nomenklatura and security apparatus with some representatives of the emerging entrepreneurial class. This elite effectively privatized most of Russian industry: the lucrative oil and gas sector, the largest aluminum, nickel, platinum, and palladium plants in the world, and that giant but creaky Soviet flagship airline, Aeroflot. A stock market appeared, then soared to become the best-performing financial market in the world (1996-97) before crashing in 1998.

The new elite included members of the old nomenklatura as well as representatives of the emerging entrepreneurial class.

The new business oligarchy attempted to create a rough-and-tumble universe of the new Russian commercial banking (which collapsed in August 1998, leaving billions of dollars of debt behind). Fortunes were made, but many lives were lost (or destroyed) in the process. At one point in the mid-1990s, Moscow had more Mercedes 600 cars than the rest of Europe combined.

Prostitution and drug use, both very hush-hush in the Soviet era, became open and rampant. Russian society may have lost some of the warped values of the communist era, but it failed to gain any others instead. The Orthodox Church, heavily penetrated by the Soviet secret police, hardly provided a substitute for the spiritual vacuum of the late communist and post-communist era. Instead, it was busy begging for tariff breaks for its vast alcohol and tobacco importing operations. A spiritual leader of the liberal reformers of the Church, Father Alexander Men, was brutally murdered. Other reformers and dissidents in the Church, such as Father Gleb Yakunin and Father Georgi Edelstein, were defrocked or exiled to far-away parishes.

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The new oligarchy seized control of the Soviet TV channels while building new media outlets. As the corpses of bank presidents multiplied, so did the horror stories in the Western media connecting the oligarchs with corruption at the highest level in the Kremlin.

Yeltsin, like many a revolutionary before him, came from the ruling class of the previous regime, from the apex of the communist nomenklatura. He was a nonvoting member of Mikhail Gorbachev's Politburo and first secretary of the Moscow city party organization before he officially broke with the communists and launched his own bid for power. Yeltsin's star turn on the global stage came as leader of the opposition to the hard-line communist coup in August 1991. Russia's history — and that of the world — would have been very different if the gray apparatchik conspirators, who included Gorbachev's own vice president, the Soviet defense minister, the interior minister, and the head of the KGB, had succeeded in restoring a Brezhnevite Soviet Union and eliminating Gorbachev and Yeltsin.

Yeltsin's personal style was authoritarian. However, his political instincts were somewhat more democratic.

Yeltsin's personal style was authoritarian. In October 1993, he sent troops to shell the White House, then the seat of a rebellious Russian Supreme Soviet dominated by communists and other hard-liners. He did not allow other politicians to build their own power bases, changing his prime ministers as often as Nicholas II. However, unlike the last czar, his political instincts were somewhat more democratic. He refused to rule as an autocrat after defeating the Supreme Soviet. He did not dispute the decision of the pro-communist courts to pardon the 1991 coup plotters or the 1993 Duma pardon of the hard-line opposition. Yeltsin permitted parliamentary elections and accepted their bitter results both in 1993 (which gave a victory to the clownish nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky) and in 1995 (a communist last hurrah). While he had the authority to dissolve the Duma and call for new elections, he never made use of it. Once he had pushed through a constitution, he adhered to it, refusing his confidante and chief bodyguard Alexander Korzhakov's advice to cancel the 1996 presidential elections.

Yeltsin's weaknesses and drawbacks were as significant as his achievements. While he operated well during crises, he quickly lost interest in the daily affairs of state. Perhaps due to his lack of understanding of economics and the law, he allowed the privatization of the vast and obsolete Russian industrial base to be abused and corrupted by insiders. He never understood the necessity of building a functioning legal system, including a framework for the enforcement of contracts, or of maintaining an adequate law enforcement apparatus. Disintegration of the legal system became so advanced that

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in some towns judges were placed on retainer by larger law offices. In other cities, lawyers paid for judges' office supplies.

Having surrounded himself with corrupt cronies and financiers, Yeltsin paid only lip service to fighting crime and corruption. He presided over an unprecedented deterioration in Russia's internal security and law enforcement. The population became disgruntled as bandits ruled the streets and businesses, while businesspeople, foreign and domestic, balked at investing. Taken together, the failures of the post-communist transformation and the inability to construct even a minimal social safety net lowered the already meager standard of living of tens of millions of Russians and helped make Boris Yeltsin as unpopular at the end of his term as Mikhail Gorbachev was at the end of his.

Chechnya is another black spot on Yeltsin's legacy. He launched an unsuccessful military campaign in 1994, hoping to boost his flagging popularity. The Russian generals, still smarting from the defeat in Afghanistan, learned that while the Soviet Army, with its mass of ill-trained conscripts, might have been prepared to fight on the Northern European plain, it was not ready to fight in mountains populated by Muslim guerillas. The Kremlin planners and generals did not anticipate fierce resistance by the Chechen nationalists led by the late Soviet Air Force Gen. Djohar Dudaev. Yeltsin's democratic instincts failed him when it came to non-Russian, dark-skinned mountain dwellers: He refused to meet with Dudaev or to make any concessions to his successor, the ex-Soviet Army Col. Aslan Maskhadov.

Having surrounded himself with corrupt cronies, Yeltsin only paid lip service to fighting corruption.

The first war, unconstitutional and ill-conceived, brought great humiliation to the Russian military and allowed Chechnya to effect a de facto secession. One of the reasons Russian forces performed so abysmally in 1994-96 was that Yeltsin failed either to reform the Russian military and security services or to keep them outside the grip of the pervasive corruption that marred his presidency. The war served as a cover for the generals to make millions of dollars profiteering: The generals sold artillery shells, cannon and light weapons by the trainload, claiming that all the hardware had been lost in battle. Moreover, they sold some of the weapons to the Chechen militants they were supposed to be fighting. No wonder Yeltsin had to sue for peace before the 1996 presidential election, following debacle after debacle in the battlefield.

That did not close the subject, however. Yeltsin authorized preparations for a new invasion of Chechnya in spring 1999. In August that year, Chechen militants Shamil Basaev and Khattab (the nom de guerre of a Jordanian-born Chechen) invaded Dagestan with several hundred militant Islamic fighters. The two claimed that they had embarked on a jihad against

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Russia and intended to establish an Islamic state in the Northern Caucasus from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea. Russian oil interests in the Caspian were endangered, and the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation was put in question. The "field commanders" were repelled in August, but four mysterious explosions blasted through apartment buildings in Moscow and the south of Russia.

These heinous acts were immediately pinned on the Chechens, and in September 1999, Yeltsin authorized a full-scale invasion of Chechnya to erase the defeat of the 1994-96 war and to assist the election of his chosen successor, Putin. The second Chechen war resulted in over 10,000 killed and 250,000 refugees. The city of Grozny was effectively erased from the face of the earth, the worst urban destruction in Europe since World War II.

Finally, there was the ignominy of the presidential pardon Putin granted Yeltsin. The ex-ruler of Russia and his family were connected in published accounts to a massive bribery scandal originating with the Mabetex company based in Lugano, Switzerland. There were also charges in Moscow that Yeltsin's family members received villas as presents from influential Russian business tycoons. When Russia's left-leaning former prosecutor general, Yuri Skuratov, attempted to investigate these allegations, a tape surfaced showing him cavorting with two prostitutes whose services were reportedly paid for by a banker he was also investigating. Yeltsin fired Skuratov in the wake of the rather conveniently timed scandal.

On his first day in office, acting Russian President Putin pardoned Yeltsin for any possible misdeeds and granted him total immunity from prosecution (or even from being searched and questioned) for any and all actions committed while in office. Yeltsin also received a life pension and a state dacha. An orderly transition of power? Perhaps. A demonstration that you can get away with a lot while in public office? Certainly.

Putin's debut

VLADIMIR PUTIN IS A TOUGH (some say ruthless), competent, non-ideological ruler. Moscow pundits agree that he is more focused than his predecessor. Igor Malashenko, a well-known Russian commentator, recently stated that Yeltsin presided over a "disorganized autocracy," while he anticipates that Putin's will be an orderly one. A prominent Russian businessman termed the whole of Putin's generation "ruthless and unprincipled." Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, in a view shared by at least one Russian reformist politician, thinks that Putin is a moderate nationalist. There is little doubt that Putin is a statist who surrounds himself with "securocrats" — long-tested collaborators primarily from the intelligence services.

Putin's speeches and interviews demonstrate beyond doubt that he is acutely aware of Russia's weaknesses and deficiencies. He understands that

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Russia's over-dependence on energy exports, with their market volatility, bodes ill for a country of 150 million people. Putin became aware of Russia's industrial decline during the 1980s, while he was stationed in Dresden, East Germany, as a KGB intelligence officer. During his stint in the GDR, he was reportedly involved in some "technological acquisitions" (industrial espionage) for Moscow and was a KGB liaison to the East German secret police, the Stasi. Putin is said to have realized that the Soviet Union did not possess the manufacturing base necessary for the early post-industrial age. It could not even manufacture adequate personal computers and mainframes. Given his position at the time, he must have been aware of the inadequacies of the Soviet Union's late start in the information age. The highly centralized, incompetently run economy was losing to the West.

Putin's eventual involvement in reformist politics and his current preoccupation with economic growth rates as well as Russia's technology base do not contradict his security background. His treatise on Russia's place in the twenty-first century (published on the Russian government's website) claims that by growing 8 percent to 10 percent a year, Russia can catch up with Western Europe's current levels of production within 15 to 20 years. Unfortunately, Russia grew only 2 percent during the very favorable economic climate of 1999.

Thus far, Putin's political and public relations instincts have been astute.

Thus far, Putin's political and public relations instincts have been astute. He was filmed giving out hunting knives to Russian officers and troops in the trenches of Chechnya the morning of New Year's Day, when most Russians were sound asleep after having spent the night toasting the new millennium. He sent Yeltsin's daughter, Tatyana Diachenko, packing on his first day on the job. The notorious Diachenko not only was her father's Kremlin advisor, but is also alleged to have spearheaded many of the corrupt financial dealings attributed to the Yeltsin family. He fired Yeltsin's presidential property manager, Pavel Pavlovich Borodin, who is now being sought by police in Switzerland. He demoted Nikolai Aksenenko, first deputy prime minister in charge of the economic portfolio, to preside over the railways, while elevating a tough debt negotiator, former Finance Minister Mikhail Kasyanov, to the No. 1 economic position. Watching their dynamic new acting president, many Russians quoted their proverb, "a new broom, which sweeps clean."

The first political crisis of the "new broom" occurred when the newly elected Duma met. The much-anticipated "coalition for reform," including the Union of Right Forces, the liberal-left Yabloko, the Fatherland-All Russia Party led by Primakov and Luzhkov, and Putin's party, the Unity Party (a.k.a. the Bear) failed to materialize. Instead, Putin struck a compromise with the communists. Gennady Seleznev, a fellow Peterbourgeois and a

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rather docile former Duma speaker, was reelected. The Duma communist faction received the largest number of committee chairmanships, nine, while the opposition coalition got only three committees.

While the liberal factions cried foul, the coalition with the communists made sense for Putin from a number of angles. To begin with, it denied Primakov the important perch of chairmanship of the Duma, from which he could have challenged the acting president. Second, it made the communists appear not to be in implacable opposition to the Kremlin prior to the presidential elections. In addition, the move provided Putin with a manageable chairman within the legislature. And finally, it struck a blow to the cocky Union of Right Forces and its de facto leader, Anatoly Chubais, who had boasted that Putin was in his pocket.

Putin's "pact with the devil" dealt a blow to hopes for a reformist agenda.

But Putin's "pact with the devil" dealt a blow to hopes for a reformist agenda. While the communists may well give Putin parliamentary votes, the Union of Right Forces could have provided him not only loyal Duma members but also a relatively competent (by Russian standards) pool of yuppie policy analysts and managers. These experts would have been independent of Boris Berezovsky and his group. In addition, the coalition with the communists served to discredit Putin among the Russian elites and anti-communist voters and did nothing to boost his image in the West. While the deal might be sensible tactically, in the long run it undermines the same reforms that Putin claims he is so anxious to promote. The communist faction in the Duma will not support the private ownership of land, a new bankruptcy law, and tax reform, all of which are at the top of the reformist legislative agenda. Putin will need the voices of the democrats, namely Yabloko, and some of the Fatherland deputies, in order to legislate Russia forward.

Even more worrisome is Putin's reliance on the St. Petersburg "mafia" of ex-KGB officers to staff his administration. These advisors make the Russian intellectuals nervous. They cite potentially repressive steps, from Internet controls to outright censorship and a crackdown on Russia's relatively free media. Two cases in point of the tendency toward greater intervention in the media came to light recently. In January 2000, Vladimir Babitsky, Radio Liberty's correspondent in Chechnya, was arrested by the Russian military and then disappeared. When he finally resurfaced, he was immediately re-arrested. The Russian prosecutor's office is threatening to charge him with treason. In another incident, also in January, Alexander Khinshtein, a Muscovite investigative reporter, was threatened with incarceration in a psychiatric prison for digging into the background and business practices of the controversial tycoon Berezovsky and Interior Minister Vladimir Rushailo. This was the first time since the Soviet era that authorities attempted to use psychiatric prisons for intimidation.

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Yeltsin and Putin: Is the jury still out?

YELTSIN TOOK OVER when Russia was in a declining trajectory. He and his advisors borrowed such concepts from the West as price liberalization and privatization, as well as political architecture, in an attempt to bring the country's political and economic systems into compliance with contemporary Western models. Expectations were high. The Russian leaders led the public to believe that this "borrowing" would effect a palpable improvement in the standard of living almost immediately. They were naive. It is clear that with all the political and economic innovation of the 1980s and 1990s, Russia failed to bring about the kind of free market and democratic reforms that would facilitate the country's inclusion into the Western family of nations. Russia has not even achieved the level of integration and growth reached by such Central European countries as Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and the three Baltic states.

The historic experience of Russian reforms since the time of Peter the Great demonstrates that when elements of Western technology and social mechanisms are introduced from the top, this is usually an attempt by the ruling elite to close technological and military gaps between Russia and its perceived adversaries. By introducing glasnost and perestroika, Gorbachev hoped to revitalize socialism to allow for easier absorption of Western technological innovation. Usually, the democratization of political life, greater participation in governance, and economic liberalization have either been granted from above (Alexander II, 1860-81) or have been forced by the elites (Nicholas II, 1905-17; Gorbachev, 1989-90; Yeltsin, 1992-99). Under the most aggressive reformers, Peter I and Stalin, the price for reforms has been paid by the populace, who were taxed without pity and sent to work like serfs.

What about the incomplete reforms of the post-Soviet period? What benchmarks can we establish according to which we will be able to judge Russia's progress this time around?

Nurturing civil society and participatory democracy on Russian soil, including the support of free media. Under communism, all volunteer and professional organizations, as well as commercial and business activities, were run by the state. Since Gorbachev, thousands of private businesses and nonprofit organizations have sprung up, unleashing a pent-up energy for civic and business activity. When Vladimir Putin talks about strengthening the role of the state and improving government efficiency, many Russian commentators and democratic activists are worried. Is Putin talking about a paternalistic state, such as Germany or Sweden, or something more sinister? Putin brought many of his KGB buddies into positions of power in the Kremlin. And his business allies' control over most important outlets of the mass media, especially the two national TV channels, ORT and RTR, as well

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as attempts to regulate the Internet, may seriously endanger the future of free media in Russia.

Maintaining the federal nature of the Russian state, preventing both its disintegration and the reemergence of a centralized unitary state or an empire. Under Yeltsin, the election of regional governors was introduced for the first time in Russian history. Power partially shifted from the center in Moscow to the 89 regional capitals of Russia (roughly equivalent in size and population to U.S. states, and in many cases much vaster). Ethnically based constituent republics of the Russian Federation were particularly vociferous in asserting their unique "state rights," often contradicting federal legislation by promulgating their own rules. Putin has floated some trial balloons about abolition of gubernatorial elections and wants to revert to the czarist and Soviet practice of regional governors nominated from the center. Such a radical move, which cannot be accomplished without a fundamental constitutional change, would be a move toward authoritarianism.

Putin has floated some trial balloons about abolition of gubernatorial elections.

Resolving ethnic and religious conflicts through peaceful means and preventing a surge of xenophobia and racism. Russia is a multi-ethnic state that still grapples with the question of who is a Russian, with the rights of "Russian-speakers" in the neighboring countries, and with the status of its own Muslim citizens (Chechens, Ingush, Dagestani, and others). Registration of ethnicity in internal passports and governmental documents is mandatory (though a person has a right to refuse to answer such a question). In the early 1990s, Yeltsin challenged regional leaders to take all the sovereignty they could. He was exaggerating: Moscow insists on ruling the regions from the center, having a say in the distribution of wealth and major economic decisions of the provinces.

In the large non-Russian republics, such as Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, the "titular" national elite, which often consists of the Soviet-era nomenklatura, is anxious to preserve its hold on power. Often, the fight over the control of the vast natural resources is depicted as ethnically motivated: Tatars or Yakuts against Russians. In reality, it is also a fight over the control of wealth. For example, Tatarstan and Bashkortostan are rich in oil, while the Komi republic (Hanty-Mansi and Yamal-Nenets districts) is virtually one giant natural gas field. The Republic of Yakutia-Sakha in Eastern Siberia is one of the largest diamond producing areas in the world. How the pie is going to be divided among Moscow and the regions is a serious challenge for the next Russian president.

Since the war in Chechnya, attacks on dark-skinned citizens of Russia and the former Soviet Union are on the rise. So are the number and relative strength of ultranationalist and xenophobic organizations, such as the neo-Nazi Russian National Unity (RNU), led by Vladimir Barkashov. This move-

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ment attacks Christianity as a "Jewish ruse"; its supporters wear black uniforms and use a Nazi salute; and it utilizes a modified swastika as its symbol. Members of RNU were charged in a number of murders believed to be initiation tests for would-be members of the movement. While RNU claims 100,000 members and supporters, including some in the armed services and the police, the real number is lower, possibly around 10,000. They were disqualified from running in the 1999 Duma and 2000 presidential elections. Other organizations, such as Pamiat, attempt to break up political meetings of democratic organizations; they have also attacked synagogues. The Communist Party of the Russian Federation is another bulwark of racism. Extremist nationalists do not seem too dangerous at the ballot box, but may influence the youth and some in the security services, police, and the military. The test is whether they will continue to be marginalized or permitted to bid for mainstream acceptance.

Modern markets are extremely complex systems, dependent upon the proper function of numerous highly sophisticated elements.

Building the accountable, functioning, and transparent institutions of a market economy. Russian reformists in the economic policy area naively posited that deregulation of prices and privatization of industrial enterprises would quickly allow for a market economy to build itself spontaneously. They were too optimistic. Modern markets are extremely complex systems, dependent upon the proper function of numerous highly sophisticated elements, from commercial banks to futures markets to banking supervisory structures. Such market institutions require a competent legislature and a clean bureaucracy. While privatization and price deregulation have been largely achieved (with the exception of land, oil and gas pipelines, and railroad privatization), the banking system, the capital markets, and the entire system of government regulation of the economy, including the Central Bank of Russia and Ministry of Finance, leave much to be desired by Western standards. Since the August 1998 financial collapse, economic reforms have all but stopped. Monopolists' vested interests, centralizing approaches of the Soviet era, a dearth of qualified personnel, as well as the pervasive corruption are slowing down the reform process.

Achieving sustainable economic growth; making Russia attractive for foreign investment and hospitable to domestic entrepreneurship. Russia has become a net exporter of capital on an unprecedented scale: From 1987 on, between $20 billion and $24 billion in capital has departed Russia on a yearly basis. The overall amount of exported Russian capital is a staggering $300 billion. This is much more than the combined Western portfolio and

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direct investment, as well as bilateral (country to country) and multilateral assistance (from such organizations as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank). The reasons for capital flight include inhospitable tax and macroeconomic environments, pervasive corruption, and bureaucratic red tape.

The examples of several Latin American countries, such as Brazil and Argentina, have demonstrated that once significant economic reforms are implemented, expatriated capital returns. However, the Putin administration may attempt to tackle the problem by police regulation, not via macroeconomic adjustment and liberalization.

Legislating the most necessary elements of the much-anticipated economic package (including private property on land, revamped bankruptcy laws, and tax reform). Russia is a naturally endowed cornucopia of tremendous wealth. In order to turn it into a rapidly developing economy, the government needs to create economic conditions that would make Russia a level playing field for domestic and foreign investors. This includes the introduction of private property on land, including for mining, agricultural activities, and construction; a significant decrease of tax rates, which currently may take away over 100 percent of a business entity's profit; simplification of the tax code; and optimization of asset distribution through transparent and equitable bankruptcy procedures. Instead of embracing these reforms, Putin's first deputy prime minister (de facto prime minister) and chief economic advisor Mikhail Kasyanov voiced resistance to free market principles of economic management, criticizing calls for tax reduction and private land holdings. Putin did not support the Union of Right Forces' idea of conducting a national referendum to push through land privatization. Without it, ordinary Russians may continue languishing in poverty while a thin layer of the super-rich oligarchs and ex-communist nomenklatura capitalize on their political connections.

The government needs to create economic conditions that would make Russia a level playing field for domestic and foreign investors.

Improving the legal system, including the enforcement of court rulings, and enacting effective mechanisms for dispute resolution. Russian courts and contract enforcement are probably the most crucial missing link in the puzzle of economic reform. While some vital areas, such as private real property, have gone unlegislated, other laws are not adequately implemented. Contracts are more often enforced by the mob than by courts and police. Judges often take bribes and tweak their rulings accordingly. The failure is aggravated by scarcity of contract enforcement personnel (court bailiffs were introduced only a couple of years ago). Lawyers are few, and those who are

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available were often trained in the socialist, politicized, and criminal law-based system of the Soviet era, or the second-rate post-Soviet colleges that pass for law schools.

Building a small and efficient state, instead of the current bloated and ineffective one. Today, Russia boasts twice as many bureaucrats as there were in the Soviet Union in 1989. The government pays its workers little but gives them vast powers to regulate business and economic activity. Thus, the big eyes and hungry mouths of the bureaucracy cause companies to spend up to 8 percent of gross income on bribes, in one estimate. In some cities, organized crime, which often exists symbiotically with the government and law enforcement, takes bribes amounting to as much as 25 percent to 30 percent of company's gross income.

A comprehensive government reform is in order, one that will cut by at least half the state apparatus, including the large military forces (currently belonging to the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, the Border Guards, the railroad troops, Emergency Ministry troops, etc.). Economic regulators, who are notorious for taking bribes, have to be under strict orders not to interfere with business activity, especially by vulnerable small and medium-sized businesses. The biggest challenge will be curbing unnecessary regulation while keeping the much-abused environment intact and observing at least minimal health standards.

Today, Russia boasts twice as many bureaucrats as there were in the Soviet Union in 1989.

Cracking down on organized crime and corruption. Today, the police and security services are part of the problem, not part of the solution. The police collect protection money from businesses while granting cover (*krysha* in Russian, or "roof") to shady businessmen, drug dealers, prostitutes, and smugglers. The highest "authorities" in organized crime have bought seats on the Duma lists of several political parties and are often seen as guests of honor at social events in Moscow. If Putin is serious about his much-hailed platform of law and order, this has to change. Not only do well-known criminal leaders need to go to jail, but high ranking government officials and oligarchs who broke the law should also be prosecuted. Only then will Russians have reason to believe that democracy and the machinery of the state serve them.

Reforming the military and security apparatus, including democratization of these services and effective civilian, budgetary, and legislative control. The Russian military is on the verge of escaping civilian control. Its indiscriminate use of force in Chechnya against Russian civilians is a prime example. The generals who commanded the field operations threatened the Yeltsin government with "resignations, or worse" if the Kremlin entered into negotiations with the Chechen leadership. In addition, the military still has not accounted for billions of dollars of equipment and ammunition that disap-

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peared as the Soviet Army withdrew from Eastern Europe and fought the wars in Chechnya, Moldova, Tajikistan, and elsewhere.

At the same time, the military loudly demands and gets increased budgets, including a 50 percent hike in overall appropriations for fiscal 2000, a 57 percent increase in new system acquisitions, and an 80 percent increase in research and development funds. Russia *officially* is spending just over 3 percent of its GDP on the military; unofficial figures are as high as 10 percent (when the Interior Ministry and other quasi-militarized budgets are taken into account). With an official per capita annual GDP of $1,500 to $2,000 (the figure could be as high $4,000 per capita once all informal economic activities are taken into account), the Russians cannot afford to feed and equip so many uniformed "protectors of the Motherland." The heirs of Tchaikovsky and Tolstoy deserve a better lot.

The temptations of history

VLADIMIR PUTIN WILL BE strongly tempted to revert to the traditional paths of autocracy and statism. As a former intelligence officer and head of the secret police, he has the right profile to emerge as a centralizing, strong leader in the tradition of Peter the Great, or even worse, Nicholas I, the preeminent monarch-policeman of the first part of the nineteenth century. Putin's entry into the political scene is inescapably connected to the war in Chechnya, which, the critics say, was engineered to launch the "Putin for President" campaign. He may see both the fate of Russia and his rule through the traditional prism of military prowess and conquest.

Like many Russian rulers before him, Putin may be interested in maintaining a dialogue and exchange with the West in order to attract the technology and investment needed to build military power. The Chinese leadership starting with Deng Xiaoping has pursued this strategy quite successfully. Or Putin may realize that Russia, despite the preachings of the Slavophiles and Eurasianists (those who see Russia's greatness as lying *between* East and West), does not really have a "third way" that can permanently and viably separate it from the West; and so instead it must continue to absorb Western values and economic and government mechanisms. In the decentralized, entrepreneurial, and globalizing environment of the twenty-first century, the traditional preoccupation of Russia's elites with a strong, paternalistic, and sometimes aggressive state could prove too taxing, and in the end, self-defeating. Such a form of government, based on bureaucratic regulation, may further breed the corruption that is already choking Western investment and causing unprecedented capital flight from Russia.

If indeed Russia becomes more bureaucratic and authoritarian, will it also become more dangerous for the West? Not necessarily: It will still be a slow-growing economy with a GDP of about $250 billion to $300 billion a year

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and a military budget a fraction of that of the United States. It may become more dangerous for its immediate neighbors, especially those against whom influential circles in Moscow bear a grudge — Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze, for example, or oil-rich Azerbaijan, or countries with large Russian-speaking minorities, such as Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine, or Kazakhstan. The challenge for the West would then be how to respond to a Russian threat against these countries, if and when it materializes.

Russia, as many times before, has approached a fork in its road to modernization. For the first time in the past 10 years, it will be making a decision on its direction without Boris Yeltsin. Whether he will be remembered for bringing down communism and the Soviet Union and presiding over the transition to a market economy — or for institutionalizing corruption, failing to reform the security apparatus and the military, and embroiling Russia in a prolonged war in the Caucasus — will largely depend on where Russia goes from here. Thus Yeltsin's place in history is to a large degree in the hands of his chosen successor, Vladimir Putin. The Yeltsin chapter in the Russian quest for identity and its place in the world is over. The Putin chapter has begun.

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Marijuana on the Ballot

By JAMES R. MCDONOUGH

WHILE IT HAS LONG BEEN CLEAR that chemical compounds found in the marijuana plant offer potential for medical use, smoking the raw plant is a method of delivery supported neither by law nor recent scientific evidence. The Food and Drug Administration's approval process, which seeks to ensure the purity of chemical compounds in legitimate drugs, sets the standard for medical validation of prescription drugs as safe and effective. Diametrically opposed to this long-standing safeguard of medical science is the recent spate of state election ballots that have advocated the use of a smoked plant — the marijuana leaf — for "treating" an unspecified number of ailments. It is a tribute to the power of political activism that popular vote has displaced objective science in advancing what would be the only smoked drug in America under the guise of good medicine.

Two recent studies of the potential medical utility of marijuana advocate development of a non-smoked, rapid onset delivery system of the cannabis compounds. But state ballot initiatives that seek legalization of smoking marijuana as medicine threaten to circumvent credible research. Advocates for smoking marijuana appear to want to move ahead at all costs, irrespective of dangers to the user. They make a well-financed, emotional appeal to the voting public claiming that what they demand is humane, useful, and safe. Although they rely largely on anecdote to document their claims, they seize upon partial statements that purport to validate their assertions. At the same time, these partisans — described by Chris Wren, the highly respected journalist for the *New York Times*, as a small coalition of libertarians, liber-

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als, humanitarians, and hedonists — reject the main conclusions of medical science: that there is little future in smoked marijuana as a medically approved medication.

A dearth of scientific support

COMPOUNDS FOUND IN MARIJUANA may have medical potential, but science does not support smoking the plant in its crude form as an appropriate delivery system. An exploration of two comprehensive inquiries into the medical potential of marijuana indicates the following:

- Science has identified only the *potential* medical benefit of chemical compounds, such as THC, found in marijuana. Ambitious research is necessary to understand fully how these substances affect the human body.
- Experts who have dealt with all available data *do not* recommend that the goal of research should be smoked marijuana for medical conditions. Rather, they support development of a smoke-free, rapid-onset delivery system for compounds found in the plant.

In 1997, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) met "to review the scientific data concerning the potential therapeutic uses of marijuana and the need for and feasibility of additional research." The collection of experts had experience in relevant studies and clinical research, but held no preconceived opinions about the medical use of marijuana. They were asked the following questions: What is the current state of scientific knowledge; what significant questions remain unanswered; what is the medical potential; what possible uses deserve further research; and what issues should be considered if clinical trials are conducted?

Shortly thereafter, the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) asked the Institute of Medicine (IOM) to execute a similar task: to form a panel that would "conduct a review of the scientific evidence to assess the potential health benefits and risks of marijuana and its constituent cannabinoids." Selected reviewers were among the most accomplished in the disciplines of neuroscience, pharmacology, immunology, drug abuse, drug laws, oncology, infectious diseases, and ophthalmology. Their analysis focused on the effects of isolated cannabinoids, risks associated with medical use of marijuana, and the use of smoked marijuana. Their findings in the IOM study stated:

> Compared to most drugs, the accumulation of medical knowledge about marijuana has proceeded in reverse. Typically, during the course of drug development, a compound is first found to have some medical benefit. Following this, extensive tests are undertaken to determine the

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> safety and proper dose of the drug for medical use. Marijuana, in contrast, has been widely used in the United State for decades. . . . The data on the adverse effects of marijuana are more extensive than the data on effectiveness. Clinical studies of marijuana are difficult to conduct.

Nevertheless, the IOM report concluded that cannabinoid drugs do have *potential* for therapeutic use. It specifically named pain, nausea and vomiting, and lack of appetite as symptoms for which cannabinoids may be of benefit, stating that cannabinoids are "moderately well suited" for AIDS wasting and nausea resulting from chemotherapy. The report found that cannabinoids "probably have a natural role in pain modulation, control of movement, and memory," but that this role "is likely to be multi-faceted and remains unclear."

Compounds found in marijuana may have medical potential, but science does not support smoking the plant.

In addressing the possible effects of smoked marijuana on pain, the NIH report explained that no clinical trials involving patients with "naturally occurring pain" have ever been conducted but that two credible studies of cancer pain indicated analgesic benefit. Addressing another possible benefit — the reduction of nausea related to chemotherapy — the NIH report described a study comparing oral administration of THC (via a drug called Dronabinol) and smoked marijuana. Of 20 patients, nine expressed no preference between the two, seven preferred the oral THC, and only four preferred smoked marijuana. In summary, the report states, "No scientific questions have been definitively answered about the efficacy of smoked marijuana in chemotherapy-related nausea and vomiting."

In the area of glaucoma, the effect of marijuana on intraocular pressure (the cause of optic nerve damage that typifies glaucoma) was explored, and smoked marijuana was found to reduce this pressure. However, the NIH report failed to find evidence that marijuana can "safely and effectively lower intraocular pressure enough to prevent optic nerve damage." The report concluded that the "mechanism of action" of smoked marijuana or THC in pill form on intraocular pressure is not known and calls for more research.

In addressing appetite stimulation and wasting related to AIDS, the NIH report recognized the potential benefit of marijuana. However, the report also noted the lack of pertinent data. The researchers pointed out that the evidence known to date, although plentiful, is anecdotal, and "no objective data relative to body composition alterations, HIV replication, or immunologic function in HIV patients are available."

Smoking marijuana as medicine was recommended by neither report. The IOM report called smoked marijuana a "crude THC delivery system" that is

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not recommended because it delivers harmful substances, pointing out that botanical products are susceptible to problems with consistency, contaminations, uncertain potencies, and instabilities. The NIH report reached the same conclusion and explained that eliminating the smoked aspect of marijuana would "remove an important obstacle" from research into the potential medical benefits of the plant.

These studies present a consistent theme: Cannabinoids in marijuana do show potential for symptom management of several conditions, but research is inadequate to explain definitively *how* cannabinoids operate to deliver these potential benefits. Nor did the studies attribute any curative effects to marijuana; at best, only the symptoms of particular medical conditions are affected. The finding most important to the debate is that the studies did not advocate smoked marijuana as medicine. To the contrary, the NIH report called for a non-smoked alternative as a focus of further research. The IOM report recommended smoking marijuana as medicine only in the most extreme circumstances *when all other medication has failed* and then only when administration of marijuana is under strict medical supervision.

These conclusions from two studies, based not on rhetorical conjecture but on credible scientific research, do not support the legalization of smoked marijuana as medicine.

The scientific community's views

THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE NIH AND IOM reports are supported by commentary published in the nation's medical journals. Much of this literature focuses on the problematic aspect of smoke as a delivery system when using cannabinoids for medical purposes. One physician-authored article describes smoking "crude plant material" as "troublesome" to many doctors and "unpleasant" to many patients. Dr. Eric Voth, chairman of the International Drug Strategy Institute, stated in a 1997 article published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (*JAMA*): "To support research on smoked pot does not make sense. We're currently in a huge anti-tobacco thrust in this country, which is appropriate. So why should we waste money on drug delivery that is based on smoking?" Voth recommends non-smoked analogs to THC.

In September, 1998, the editor in chief of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, Dr. Jerome P. Kassirer, in a coauthored piece with Dr. Marcia Angell, wrote:

> Until the 20th century, most remedies were botanical, a few of which were found through trial and error to be helpful. All of that began to change in the 20th century as a result of rapid advances in medical science. In particular, the evolution of the randomized, controlled clinical trial enabled researchers to study with precision the safety, efficacy, and

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> dose effects of proposed treatments and the indications for them. No longer do we have to rely on trial and error and anecdotes. We have learned to ask and expect statistically reliable evidence before accepting conclusions about remedies.

Dr. Robert DuPont of the Georgetown University Department of Psychiatry points out that those who aggressively advocate smoking marijuana as medicine "undermine" the potentially beneficial roles of the NIH and IOM studies. As does Dr. Voth, DuPont discusses the possibility of non-smoked delivery methods. He asserts that if the scientific community were to accept smoked marijuana as medicine, the public would likely perceive the decision as influenced by politics rather than science. Dupont concludes that if research is primarily concerned with the needs of the sick, it is unlikely that science will approve of smoked marijuana as medicine.

Even those who advocate smoking marijuana for medicine are occasionally driven to caution.

Even those who advocate smoking marijuana for medicine are occasionally driven to caution. Dr. Lester Grinspoon, a Harvard University professor and advocate of smoking marijuana, warned in a 1994 *JAMA* article: "The one area we have to be concerned about is pulmonary function. The lungs were not made to inhale anything but fresh air." Other experts have only disdain for the loose medical claims for smoked marijuana. Dr. Janet Lapey, executive director of Concerned Citizens for Drug Prevention, likened research on smoked marijuana to using opium pipes to test morphine. She advocates research on isolated active compounds rather than smoked marijuana.

The findings of the NIH and IOM reports, and other commentary by members of the scientific and medical communities, contradict the idea that plant smoking is an appropriate vehicle for delivering whatever compounds research may find to be of benefit.

Enter the FDA

THE MISSION of the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Center for Drug Evaluation and Research is "to assure that safe and effective drugs are available to the American people." Circumvention of the FDA approval process would remove this essential safety mechanism intended to safeguard public health. The FDA approval process is not designed to keep drugs out of the hands of the sick but to offer a system to ensure that drugs prevent, cure, or treat a medical condition. FDA approval can involve testing of hundreds of compounds, which allows scientists to

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alter them for improved performance. The IOM report addresses this situation explicitly: "Medicines today are expected to be of known composition and quantity. Even in cases where marijuana can provide relief from symptoms, the crude plant mixture does not meet this modern expectation."

For a proposed drug to gain approval by the FDA, a potential manufacturer must produce a new drug application. The application must provide enough information for FDA reviewers to determine (among other criteria) "whether the drug is safe and effective for its proposed use(s), whether the benefits of the drug outweigh its risks [and] whether the methods used in manufacturing the drug and the controls used to maintain the drug's quality are adequate to preserve the drug's integrity, strength, quality, and purity."

For the majority of symptoms there are approved drugs that are more effective.

On the "benefits" side, the Institute of Medicine found that the therapeutic effects of cannabinoids are "generally modest" and that for the majority of symptoms there are approved drugs that are more effective. For example, superior glaucoma and anti-nausea medications have already been developed. In addition, the new drug Zofran may provide more relief than THC for chemotherapy patients. Dronabinol, the synthetic THC, offers immunocompromised HIV patients a safe alternative to inhaling marijuana smoke, which contains carcinogens.

On the "risks" side, there is strong evidence that smoking marijuana has detrimental health effects. Unrefined marijuana contains approximately 400 chemicals that become combustible when smoked, producing in turn over 2,000 impure chemicals. These substances, many of which remain unidentified, include carcinogens. The IOM report states that, when used chronically, "marijuana smoking is associated with abnormalities of cells lining the human respiratory tract. Marijuana smoke, like tobacco smoke, is associated with increased risk of cancer, lung damage, and poor pregnancy outcomes." A subsequent study by Dr. Zuo-Feng Zhary of the Jonsson Cancer Center at UCLA determined that the carcinogens in marijuana are much stronger than those in tobacco.

Chronic bronchitis and increased incidence of pulmonary disease are associated with frequent use of smoked marijuana, as are reduced sperm motility and testosterone levels in males. Decreased immune system response, which is likely to increase vulnerability to infection and tumors, is also associated with frequent use. Even a slight decrease in immune response can have major public health ramifications. Because marijuana by-products remain in body fat for several weeks, interference with normal body functioning may continue beyond the time of use. Among the known effects of smoking marijuana is impaired lung function similar to the type caused by cigarette smoking.

In addressing the efficacy of cannabinoid drugs, the IOM report — after

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recognizing "potential therapeutic value" — added that smoked marijuana is "a crude THC delivery system that also delivers harmful substances." Purified cannabinoid compounds are preferable to plants in crude form, which contain inconsistent chemical composition. The "therapeutic window" between the desirable and adverse effects of marijuana and THC is narrow at best and may not exist at all, in many cases.

The scientific evidence that marijuana's potential therapeutic benefits are modest, that other approved drugs are generally more effective, and that smoking marijuana is unhealthy, indicates that smoked marijuana is not a viable candidate for FDA approval. Without such approval, smoked marijuana cannot achieve legitimate status as an approved drug that patients can readily use. This reality renders the advocacy of smoking marijuana as medicine both misguided and impractical.

Medicine by ballot initiative?

WHILE BALLOT INITIATIVES are an indispensable part of our democracy, they are imprudent in the context of advancing smoked marijuana as medicine because they confound our system of laws, create conflict between state and federal law, and fail to offer a proper substitute for science.

Ballot initiatives to legalize smoking marijuana as medicine have had a tumultuous history. In 1998 alone, initiatives were passed in five states, but any substantive benefits in the aftermath were lacking. For example, a Colorado proposal was ruled invalid before the election. An Ohio bill was passed but subsequently repealed. In the District of Colombia, Congress disallowed the counting of ballot results. Six other states permit patients to smoke marijuana as medicine but only by prescription, and doctors, dubious about the validity of a smoked medicine, wary of liability suits, and concerned about legal and professional risks are reluctant to prescribe it for their patients. Although voters passed Arizona's initiative, the state legislature originally blocked the measure. The version that eventually became Arizona law is problematic because it conflicts with federal statute.

Indeed, legalization at the state level creates a direct conflict between state and federal law in every case, placing patients, doctors, police, prosecutors, and public officials in a difficult position. The fundamental legal problem with prescription of marijuana is that federal law prohibits such use, rendering state law functionally ineffective.

To appreciate fully the legal ramifications of ballot initiatives, consider one specific example. California's is perhaps the most publicized, and illustrates the chaos that can result from such initiatives. Enacted in 1996, the California Compassionate Use Act (also known as Proposition 215) was a ballot initiative intended to afford legal protection to seriously ill patients who use marijuana therapeutically. The act explicitly states that marijuana

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used by patients must first be recommended by a physician, and refers to such use as a "right" of the people of California. According to the act, physicians and patients are not subject to prosecution if they are compliant with the terms of the legislation. The act names cancer, anorexia, AIDS, chronic pain, spasticity, glaucoma, arthritis, and migraine as conditions that may be appropriately treated by marijuana, but it also includes the proviso: "or any other illness for which marijuana provides relief."

Writing in December 1999, a California doctor, Ryan Thompson, summed up the medical problems with Proposition 215:

> As it stands, it creates vague, ill-defined guidelines that are obviously subject to abuse. The most glaring areas are as follows:
>
> - A patient does not necessarily need to be seen, evaluated or diagnosed as having any specific medical condition to qualify for the use of mari juana.
> - There is no requirement for a written prescription or even a written recommendation for its medical use.
> - Once "recommended," the patient never needs to be seen again to assess the effectiveness of the treatment and potentially could use that "recommendation" for the rest of his or her life.
> - There is no limitation to the conditions for which it can be used, it can be recommended for virtually any condition, even if it is not believed to be effective.

The doctor concludes by stating: "Certainly as a physician I have witnessed the detrimental effects of marijuana use on patients and their families. It is not a harmless substance."

Passage of Proposition 215 resulted in conflict between California and the federal government. In February 1997, the Executive Office of the President issued its response to the California Compassionate Use Act (as well as Arizona's Proposition 200). The notice stated:

> [The] Department of Justice's (D.O.J.) position is that a practitioner's practice of recommending or prescribing Schedule I controlled substances is not consistent with the public interest (as that phrase is used in the federal Controlled Substances Act) and will lead to administrative action by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to revoke the practitioner's registration.

The notice indicated that U.S. attorneys in California and Arizona would consider cases for prosecution using certain criteria. These included lack of a bona fide doctor-patient relationship, a "high volume" of prescriptions (or recommendations) for Schedule I drugs, "significant" profits derived from such prescriptions, prescriptions to minors, and "special circumstances" like impaired driving accidents involving serious injury.

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The federal government's reasons for taking such a stance are solid. Dr. Donald Vereen of the Office of National Drug Control Policy explains that "research-based evidence" must be the focus when evaluating the risks and benefits of any drug, the only approach that provides a *rational* basis for making such a determination. He also explains that since testing by the Food and Drug Administration and other government agencies is designed to protect public health, circumvention of the process is unwise.

While the federal government supports FDA approved cannabinoid-based drugs, it maintains that ballot initiatives should not be allowed to remove marijuana evaluation from the realm of science and the drug approval process — a position based on a concern for public health. The Department of Health and Human Services has revised its regulations by making research-grade marijuana more available and intends to facilitate more research of cannabinoids. The department does not, however, intend to lower its standards of scientific proof.

California courts themselves limited the distribution of medical marijuana.

Problems resulting from the California initiative are not isolated to conflict between the state and federal government. California courts themselves limited the distribution of medical marijuana. A 1997 California appellate decision held that the state's Compassionate Use Act only allowed purchase of medical marijuana from a patient's "primary caregiver," not from "drug dealers on street corners" or "sales centers such as the Cannabis Buyers' Club." This decision allowed courts to enjoin marijuana clubs.

The course of California's initiative and those of other states illustrate that such ballot-driven movements are not a legally effective or reliable way to supply the sick with whatever medical benefit the marijuana plant might hold. If the focus were shifted away from smoking the plant and toward a non-smoked alternative based on scientific research, much of this conflict could be avoided.

Filling "prescriptions"

IT IS ONE THING to pass a ballot initiative defining a burning plant as medicine. It is yet another to make available such "medicine" if the plant itself remains — as it should — illegal. Recreational use, after all, cannot be equated with medicinal use, and none of the ballots passed were constructed to do so.

Nonetheless, cannabis buyers' clubs were quick to present the fiction that, for medical benefit, they were now in business to provided relief for the sick. In California, 13 such clubs rapidly went into operation, selling marijuana openly under the guise that doing so had been legitimized at the polls. The

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problem was that these organizations were selling to people under the flimsiest of facades. One club went so far as to proclaim: "All use of marijuana is medical. It makes you smarter. It touches the right brain and allows you to slow down, to smell the flowers."

Depending on the wording of the specific ballots, legal interpretation of what was allowed became problematic. The buyers' clubs became notorious for liberal interpretations of "prescription," "doctor's recommendation," and "medical." In California, Lucy Mae Tuck obtained a prescription for marijuana to treat hot flashes. Another citizen arrested for possession claimed he was medically entitled to his stash to treat a condition exacerbated by an ingrown toenail. Undercover police in several buyers clubs reported blatant sales to minors and adults with little attention to claims of medical need or a doctor's direction. Eventually, 10 of the 13 clubs in California were closed.

Further exacerbating the confusion over smoked marijuana as medicine are doctors' concerns over medical liability.

Further exacerbating the confusion over smoked marijuana as medicine are doctors' concerns over medical liability. Without the Food and Drug Administration's approval, marijuana cannot become a pharmaceutical drug to be purchased at local drug stores. Nor can there be any degree of confidence that proper doses can be measured out and chemical impurities eliminated in the marijuana that is obtained. After all, we are talking about a leaf, and a burning one at that. In the meantime, the harmful effects of marijuana have been documented in greater scientific detail than any findings about the medical benefits of smoking the plant.

Given the serious illnesses (for example, cancer and AIDS) of some of those who are purported to be in need of smoked marijuana for medical relief and their vulnerability to impurities and other toxic substances present in the plant, doctors are loath to risk their patients' health and their own financial well-being by prescribing it. As Dr. Peter Byeff, an oncologist at a Connecticut cancer center, points out: "If there's no mechanism for dispensing it, that doesn't help many of my patients. They're not going to go out and grow it in their backyards." Recognizing the availability of effective prescription medications to control nausea and vomiting, Byeff adds: "There's no reason to prescribe or dispense marijuana."

Medical professionals recognize what marijuana-as-medicine advocates seek to obscure. The chemical makeup of any two marijuana plants can differ significantly due to minor variations in cultivation. For example, should one plant receive relative to another as little as four more hours of collective sunlight before cultivation, the two could turn out to be significantly different in chemical composition. Potency also varies according to climate and

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geographical origin; it can also be affected by the way in which the plant is harvested and stored. Differences can be so profound that under current medical standards, two marijuana plants could be considered completely different drugs. Prescribing unproven, unmeasured, impure burnt leaves to relieve symptoms of a wide range of ailments does not seem to be the high point of American medical practice.

Illegal because harmful

CANNABINOIDS found in the marijuana plant offer the potential for medical use. However, lighting the leaves of the plant on fire and smoking them amount to an impractical delivery system that involves health risks and deleterious legal consequences. There is a profound difference between an approval process that seeks to purify isolated compounds for safe and effective delivery, and legalization of smoking the raw plant material as medicine. To advocate the latter is to bypass the safety and efficacy built into America's medical system. Ballot initiatives for smoked marijuana comprise a dangerous, impractical shortcut that circumvents the drug-approval process. The resulting decriminalization of a dangerous and harmful drug turns out to be counterproductive — legally, politically, and scientifically.

Advocacy for smoked marijuana has been cast in terms of relief from suffering. The Hippocratic oath that doctors take specifies that they must "first, do no harm." Clearly some people supporting medical marijuana are genuinely concerned about the sick. But violating established medical procedure *does* do harm, and it confounds the political, medical, and legal processes that best serve American society. In the single-minded pursuit of an extreme position that harkens back to an era of home medicine and herbal remedies, advocates for smoked marijuana as medicinal therapy not only retard legitimate scientific progress but become easy prey for less noble-minded zealots who seek to promote the acceptance and use of marijuana, an essentially harmful — and, therefore, illegal — drug.

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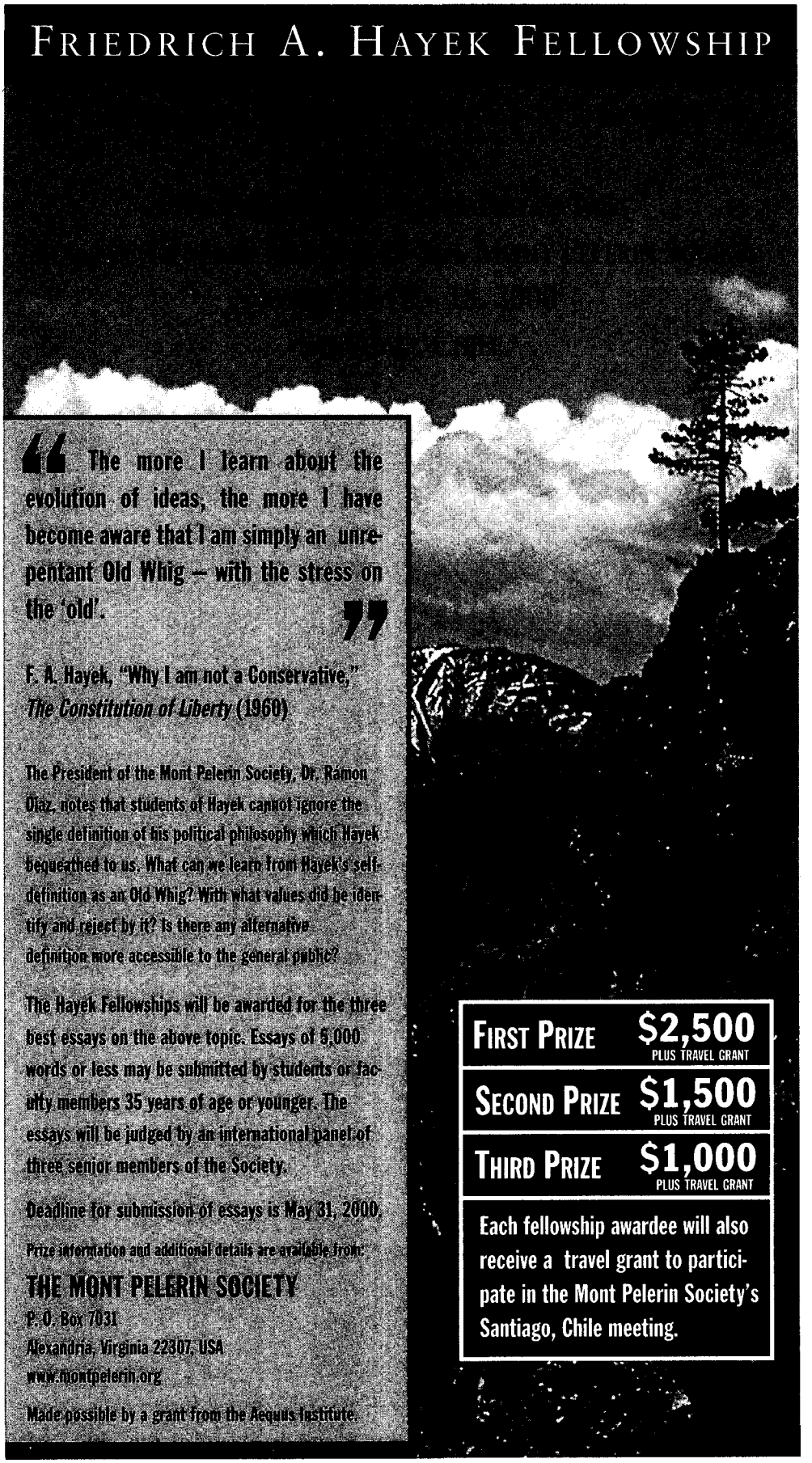
FRIEDRICH A. HAYEK FELLOWSHIP



"The more I learn about the evolution of ideas, the more I have become aware that I am simply an unrepentant Old Whig – with the stress on the 'old'."

F. A. Hayek, "Why I am not a Conservative," *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960)

The President of the Mont Pelerin Society, Dr. Ramon Diaz, notes that students of Hayek cannot ignore the single definition of his political philosophy which Hayek bequeathed to us. What can we learn from Hayek's self-definition as an Old Whig? With what values did he identify and reject by it? Is there any alternative definition more accessible to the general public?

The Hayek Fellowships will be awarded for the three best essays on the above topic. Essays of 5,000 words or less may be submitted by students or faculty members 35 years of age or younger. The essays will be judged by an international panel of three senior members of the Society.

Deadline for submission of essays is May 31, 2000.

Prize information and additional details are available from:

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Tall Tales from The Family Farm

By VICTOR DAVIS HANSON

> He sees not that sea of trouble, of labour, and expense which have been lavished on this farm. He forgets the fortitude, and the regrets.
> — *J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur,*
> Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America

ALL THIS HAPPENED on a single day one week. I opened the mailbox and flipped to a random page of an advance copy of a book on farming to find: "The natural serenity of the farm . . . ." The phone rang and a kind voice said: "You farmers are the nicest bunch of people in this country." An acquaintance from the campus greeted me: "You're so lucky to live out there where everything is so simple." On the television blared an empathetic head: "Will we still have food once our family farms are gone?" In a magazine a sensitive writer expounded: "Farming, the oldest and most timeless of man's activities. . . ."

Contrary to my inclination, but by necessity, I must define farmers as less admirable than the fantasies of nonfarmers listed above. Let me refute these

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Victor Davis Hanson is a California farmer and professor of classics at California State University, Fresno. *This essay is adapted from* The Land Was Everything: Letters from an American Farmer *by Victor Davis Hanson. Copyright © 2000 by Victor Davis Hanson. Reprinted by permission of the Free Press, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, Inc.*

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five commonly held myths by suggesting how the image of a kind, simple, and gentle agriculturist is simply untrue.

Myth 1: Farming is "serene"

IN SOME SENSE farming is peaceful — out here there are never traffic jams, few people, and not much noise in comparison to the city. Murder and rape are less frequent than in the country. And there is no X-rated theater, crack house, or all-night hotel outside my window. We hear the sirens from town, not vice-versa. Many of the greatest philosophers in the West have noted that rustic morality stems from the simple absence of temptation.

Yet Pax Agraria is a myth. The farm as a tranquil abode is the dividend of our romantic and pastoral traditions that date back to third-century B.C. Alexandria, where sophisticated and citified Greeklings dreamed that they were shepherds in Arcadia. Trapped in concrete, asphalt, and stucco, urban man idealizes — the academics would say "constructs" — what he does not know but wishes to be true, as either hope or penance for his own sometimes unsatisfying existence. So farms become "serene" and "peaceful" for those dreamers, who under no circumstances would live there. The idea of the calm north 40 is part of the same romance that explains why city folks buy enormous and awkward four-wheel-drive sport utility vehicles for rush hour traffic, or wear heavy, uncomfortable, and treaded high-top work boots just to navigate over carpet and tile. Equipped with such appurtenances, they can travel anywhere and so go nowhere. I suppose Plato would say that their reason and appetites are not rural, but their suppressed spirit is — the third great portion of our existence that longs for something primordial.

In reality, agriculture is frantic. It has cacophony and a frenzy as breakneck as any I have seen in town. Consider, for example, not the busy harvest or preharvest, but the month of February, Virgil's purported dormant "off-season." Then, farmers should be in by the fire, waiting idly for their vines to reawaken, quietly whittling to the hushed rhythm of a somnolent nature.

More likely the following is the winter vineyard scenario.

Pruning is now almost finished. But you can't just tie the selected vine canes back on the wire. Why? Because the wire has been cut, the stake staples torn out, a few stakes crushed, even a few end posts (which anchor the wire) at row's end broken through 365 days of use. Indeed, sometimes the wire of the whole row is on the ground. Pruners are paid by the vine, and so they do cut the wire in their haste to surpass the minimum wage. And they do pull grape stakes down as they yank recklessly on stubborn canes. For the prior 11 months tractors have hit posts, stakes, and vines — you now discover all this flotsam when the vine leaves and brush are gone and the year's detritus of the vineyard becomes clear at last — and for a moment.

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This wreckage has to be cleaned up before buds break out in a few weeks.

So immediately after the vine is pruned, you now madly begin to patch wire, replace stakes, end posts, staples — all in order to send men back through to tie vine canes on the wire. Remember that pruners have thrown their cut brush in every other vine row. But Hank Ortiz and his 30-year-old brush-shredder are nowhere to be found — his salary is to be made solely in the month of February, so he is custom-shredding 5,000 acres of vineyard too many. He promises only that he and his motor home will be in your yard at 2 AM and out by noon. No Hank Ortiz, no shredded brush. No shredded brush, no clear vine row; no clear vine row, no cultivation. No cultivation, no furrows. No furrows, no irrigation. No irrigation and the vines are naked to the frost. Frost and no grapes.

And it's now but 20 days to bud break.

Urban man idealizes what he does not know but wishes to be true.

But you forget for a time about Hank Ortiz, because you also need your berms weeded; in a week or two broadleafs are up. The taller those weeds grow, the harder they are to kill. Either plow them out of the row or spray them. But you can do neither without the canes tied; otherwise they flap into the sprayer's mist or the plow blade. So you fix your wire, stakes, posts, so you can tie your canes, so you can spray and cultivate and shred.

But it is now 10 days to bud break.

Forget about weeds and worry instead about fertilizing, so that nitrogen is in the ground and ready for the vines right after bud break. Yet to run the fertilizer rig, the vine rows should be weed-free — and the brush shredded and the canes tied. You intend your fertilizer rig to whiz down unobstructed vine vows, the dirt hard and clean for the shanks behind. Yet the fertilizer rig is rented out elsewhere. And the brush is not shredded. And the wire is not yet patched. And the canes are not yet tied.

And bud break is two weeks early this spring.

But stakes, wire, spray, fertilization, shredding of the vineyard are nothing to the orchard across the alleyway, which is now near blossom. Trees have a more complicated dormant sequence of pruning, shredding, fertilizing, spraying, and bees; once their cycle is disrupted by this Mr. Hank Ortiz and his now nonexistent shredding machine, everything for the next year goes wrong.

The problem? Irrigated Mediterranean agriculture, as the historian Fernand Braudel wrote, is always a race. In such temperate climates, the dormant season between leaf fall and bud break is only three months. All the orchard's pruning, the vineyard's tying, fertilization, dormant spraying, weed control, trellis maintenance, grafting, and replanting must be done in that tiny window of 90 days, when there are no leaves. In Mediterranean agriculture there is not much time to clean up the postharvest mess in time for bud break and the long year to begin anew.

Again, the rub? Many of these tasks are sequential and dependent on one

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another, and so cannot be accomplished out of synchronization and without the proper prerequisite job. Canes are tied only on wire that has been fixed; tractors drive only down vine rows that are free of brush; bees are put only in orchards that have not recently been sprayed for weeds; oil spray cannot go on popping buds or leaves.

Usually, these frantic steps could be accomplished if the farmer were on his own and in control. He is not — not ever. His autonomous world is not so autonomous, but rather predicated on shredders, beekeepers, pruners, tiers, sprayers, and a host of other free-lance workers whose success or failure depends solely on how many farms they can serve before their tardiness and missed appointments result in a confirmed reputation of unreliability and thus termination. The trick for the Hank Ortizes of the farming cosmos is to sign on for as much work as in theory might be done under perfect circumstances.

In winter, circumstances are never perfect. It is foggy here in the Valley in winter. Trucks get lost and are wrecked. It is rainy here. Fields get muddy and cannot be entered, by man or machine. It is sometimes hot in late February here, so vine and tree buds pop and swell weeks before they are supposed to. There are people who do not farm here. Thieves, neighbors, and others get in our way and we in theirs; permits, releases, and paperwork are not always easily obtained from those who are on another, a bureaucratic rather than natural, schedule. No, the farm, even in its quietest month, is not serene.

I will pass on the 90 days of "peaceful" dormancy needed to ready the other 27 tree and vine crops on this farm. And I will spare you, reader, a whine about the tractor engines to be rebuilt, the shed to be fixed, the pump to be pulled, and all the other tools and appurtenances that, like their natural counterparts, are but resting for 90 days for their needed maintenance and attention.

Farming is hectic, not peaceful at all. I have lived in Santa Cruz, New Haven, Palo Alto, and Athens. While it was loud and brutal in those cities, I sat rather slothful in my relatively quiet and comfortable apartments, always thinking of all the farmers back in Selma in their purportedly serene winter frenzy.

Myth 2: Farmers are "nice"

THIS IS THE OLD MYTH of the noble savage, which grew from the Romantic counterattack against the dry and artificial world of the European Enlightenment. To those in suits and ties, in office boxes and on smoggy freeways, farmers are to be aboriginal creatures whose muscles force the earth to give forth its bounty. Like the animals they live and work with, agrarians must be simple, hardworking brutes who, freed of urban stress and gratuitous insults and violence, are as one-dimensionally

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kind as their environment. The farmer, free of the city, reverts to a natural cycle, which returns him to his pre-state self. Thus he is purportedly "nice." No wonder French farmers have it so good: They live in a culture that never really freed itself from the silly romance of Rousseau.

Hardworking? Yes, farmers are — almost all of them. Honest, dutiful, law-abiding, and moral? Yes, as a rule, they tend to be that as well. Eccentric, occasionally stubborn, sometimes adamant? That too is a fair generalization, and they can be near delusional as well, as the price of their isolation and solitary existence and their childish trust in the next year's deliverance.

But nice or pleasant? Hardly at all. Even our first agrarian propagandist, Mr. Crèvecoeur, came close to confessing the truth of the farmer: "If his manners are not refined, at least they are rendered simple and inoffensive by tilling the earth." That is the circular mea culpa of everyone in this family: We as farmers are rude, but it is OK because we at least farm, which makes us rude.

A family member calls, then speaks in monosyllables, and abruptly hangs up. No hello, no goodbye.

In this age of therapeutics and victim-obsession, I could weave a long exegesis that the uncertainty of raising food, the duplicity involved in modern food distribution and sales, the antagonism of government and corporations, and a host of other -isms and -ologies all explain our rudeness and indifference to deportment. After all, in America it is hard now to work for 365 days on borrowed money in the hope that someone you have never met — someone cleaner, better dressed, better educated as well — will pay you money that is owed so you can pay back the bank. The job of farming made us unkind, I whine. But who cares about the cause? Farmers have always been impolite and not sweet.

A family member calls, then speaks in monosyllables, and abruptly hangs up. No hello, no goodbye. You object that this curtness is either a result of family intimacy or accepted casual telephone protocol. No. He and all the rest out here are that way to others and in person. A neighbor lady calls up later that evening, "Say, [*no salutation*] your pipeline is leaking onto my vineyard [*in fact, her pipeline was leaking into her vineyard*]. Just thought I'd let you know so you'll fix it tomorrow [*still no identification*]. Good-bye now, this is Hilda Brightwell east of you."

I once planted an orchard that grew no plums and a vineyard whose grapes always rotted. Add to that pears that burned up, quince that died, and nectarines that dried up from nematodes. The neighbors knew that circus better than I. And their response when they saw me in defeat at the property line or on the curbside? Polite indifference? Feigned ignorance? Sympathy? Never. "Well, I guess you boys planted about a hundred thousand dollars' worth of trouble, now didn't you." Even the kindest commentary went like this: "There's a lot like you who planted those no-good

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plums, and they got the same nothing as you did."

Even agrarian death is not mourned for long, but is accepted and expected as the natural wage of farming. It is seen as a slight road bump in the way of next year's harvest. Of a recently deceased neighbor of some 30 years, I have heard the following. "Well, that old bastard just plopped over out there in the field, he did. Kinda liked him too, even when he bragged more than he should. His boys will have a field day dividing up that mess, and his widow better watch out for the no-goods who might like to move into that big house with her. Bet the whole thing's sold and they're all in town and away in a year." *Requiescat in pace.*

Even agrarian death is not mourned for long, but is accepted and expected as the natural wage of farming.

You object that these cuts and rebuffs simply illustrate the petty absence of manners. Policemen and stockbrokers do it too. No, again. The absence of affability is more widespread out here. We don't have to be polite to some, rude to others, as the financial situation demands. Instead, we are generally quite fair and honest in being rude to all, we who are kings of our own eroding fiefdoms, blustering Frankish counts safe but surrounded in our castles of the Morea by hordes of Turks. We are not, then, by necessity uncivil to our inferiors and obsequious to our betters, as is the general creed in the corporation or government, as Isocrates said of the Persians. We can afford to be curt with all without prejudice or social bias, without worry about our own futures — with confidence (often misguided) that telling the truth does not harm us economically and brings with it moral reinforcement as well. A man who sees enemies of his plums and peaches on every horizon after a few years rarely smiles.

Yet unniceness at its core reveals a greater paradox in the life of the agrarian — the bitter wages of our bluntness. More than ever, the farmer at the millennium needs the cooperation of like kind to survive and battle the government and, increasingly now, corporate agribusiness. But the very regimen and semiautonomy of the family farmer's daily existence make the rustic uniquely unsuited — though not in theory unwilling — to cooperate, share, and forge any alliance that might save him. Whatever his good intentions, he has not even the veneer of the conciliator. He cannot use diction, dress, or social protocol to mask intent, much less disguise disgust or mitigate the expression of anger. The failed history of American populism and agrarian activism bears that out.

You see, all communal activity is predicated on the currency of simple kindness and good manners. But those are the exact traits that are either unneeded in the farmer's daily solitary existence or seen as liabilities ripe for exploitation by others — or sensed as a bad first step on a long road of monotony and sameness. We farmers apparently do not know how to be

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nice, even when we wish to be. When you work with dumb plants and animals, there is no reason to be either loquacious or affable. Most of the things we work with — vines, tractors, water, animals — do not have a rational mind. When it is a choice between brutal honesty and euphemism, we choose the former and are rewarded for our truth with oblivion.

I have tried in a small way to organize farmers, gone to cooperative meetings, been engaged in ad hoc and informal attempts to redress agrarian grievances. All have been relative failures — largely because I smiled, shook hands, and tried to appear both mannered and sincere, only to confirm either naiveté or weaknesses or that I had become utterly tame. After the ordeal I earned the loss of agrarian self-respect, which follows from the resort to nuance and subtlety, and the public rebuke of being both the offended and offensive.

When it is a choice between brutal honesty and euphemism, we choose the former.

A group of us once sued Sun-Maid Growers of California for its failure to return the retained moneys to us, its membership. We held meetings. We sent fliers. We made calls. We spent hundreds of hours reading briefs, plotting strategy, and appearing in court. The hardest part? Dealing with the corrupt legal class? Navigating through the labyrinth of the American court system? Facing the capital and administrative hordes of a huge, inefficient, and mostly godless cooperative? No. It was talking to fellow farmers whom we wished to help and to organize so that we could petition, sue if need be, for expropriated property. Their responses to our communitarian efforts to reclaim their lost capital?

"Now, what you are doing is just fine with me, but just exactly what do you get out of it?"

Or: "Why should I put up any money to sue anybody, when there are others with more than me?"

Or: "Sure, the whole bunch is crooked, but let me tell you first . . . ." (Twenty minutes of narration about feuds with his neighbor follow).

Or: "Mr. Hanson, just tell me right now: In two years will I or will I not get my money back. Right now, answer yes or no and then shut up and sit down."

Or: "The problem is that our damn lawyers are worse than the crooks who took our money in the first place."

And they are probably right. Still, taciturn farmers might have functioned well in an old republic of like kind, but in the democracy of the modem age they really do appear unmannerly. If I wish to be flattered, entertained, treated with perfunctory respect, and met with pro forma chitchat, I will from now on seek out peach brokers or Sun-Maid Growers of California's roving sales agents, not yeomen. If I wish to hear pleasantries, I will not go to those farmers milling around the barn or communal irrigation gate, but to a bank

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which is about to call in a loan or foreclose on a farm. As a rule, farmers are sincere and they are honest. But they really are not polite people.

Myth 3: Farming is "simple"

OUR THIRD MYTH is a product of polite condescension and also part of the age-old antitheses between city and country. Anyone who lives in the country, works with his hands, gets dirty, produces something that can be handled and felt, must be rather simple and his world equally so. This fallacy that farming is easy is held not by the mean or duplicitous but by the well-meaning and ignorant who confuse the outdoors with purity and plainness.

But family farming — not corporate agribusiness — is complex, maddening, and inexplicable. The farmer, unlike the agribusiness specialist (who really is simple), fights a war on all fronts. His money? Now an accountant, he figures interest, dividend, depreciation, profit, investment, and costs to beg for someone else's capital to pay for an entire year of the unknown before he harvests. Whatever his physical prowess in the rather mean world of his vineyard, the power of his arms and back cut no ice with a junior loan officer with red suspenders, pin-striped shirt, and round, tortoiseshell glasses. Despite his cut hands and creased flesh, the farmer must battle rather impressive gladiators in someone else's arena, constantly pitted against BSs, MBAs, and CPAs whose nets and tridents are spread sheets and software. And they really do and must say, "Mr. Hanson, are you sure of a six percent return on those plums' initial capital investment within three years? Our figures suggest otherwise." *Ave, Caesar, morituri te salutant.*

Surrounded by engines, gears, and bearings, the farmer must be a grimy shade-tree mechanic who welds, fabricates, and changes enormous water- and air-filled treaded tires that weigh far more than he. Some days he disks 60 acres of vines; but on others only two or three as in defeat he welds his broken disk, changes his worn shaft bearings, and rebuilds his ruined alternator. Of the farmer's makeshift tractor rewiring, the local dealer's authorized mechanic — certified at the Ford training center itself — scoffs, "This is a hell of a mess, even if it has worked this long. We would never do anything like this."

Our agrarian at times is no more than a thug himself, a centurion of Caesar's crack Tenth Legion whose task is to cross over the Rhine and battle the woolly Germans. In a world of macho pruners, grimy pickers, and rather angry hired shovelers, polite rebuke — even pleasant compliment — hold little sway. More likely, kindness leads to complacency and soon on to contempt, ending in outright defiance. Our farmer by bluff, brag, or muscle must at times stare down, push, threaten, hit, and run off those of America's forgotten classes who would like to see him try. He must lay down his checkbook, wrench, sugar-tester, and polite technology to wade into a crew

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to announce to men who are usually not announced to, "The next son-of-a-bitch that leaves only three canes on my vines is fired, pronto." *De l'audace, encore l'audace, toujours de l'audace!*

Puffed up with the notion that he is autonomous and a small businessman of some acumen, more often the farmer is an unthinking brute. In mid-September, the temperature over 106 degrees, most of his raisin-rolling crew suddenly vanished, he must gather up ten stragglers and himself lead these sunstroked men down the vine row in the scorching heat, shoving the caramelizing raisins — his entire pay for the year — under the vine, yelling like Frederick to his exhausted but now hesitating comrades, "Rascals, would you live forever?"

He himself must drive the tractor down his rows 12 hours and more in July, fever or not. Some April nights he is up running water for a week straight. In January he prunes a hundred vines up, a hundred vines back, his mind put on ice as legs and arms work in tandem until dusk. Too often victory or defeat is found only within his resistance against the elements and monotony, not just within his IQ or his biceps — or the ideal mean between the two. Bored silly, without cash, tired, the farmer looks at his unploughed field, his gassed-up tractor in his yard, and his relatively healthy body, and thinks to himself, "Fifteen hours from now it will all be done." *Del dicho al hecho hay gran trecho.*

The farmer must gamble more than any Las Vegas junkie — to pick early or late, fast or slow, once or twice.

But the agrarian cannot live by endurance, reason, or muscle alone. The farmer must gamble more than any Las Vegas junkie — to pick early or late, fast or slow, once or twice through the orchard. He can plant plums, peaches, nectarines, or grapes — on a hunch that one, none, or all will have a market in five years. With no salary, health insurance, retirement, disability, or unemployment insurance, the farmer's entire life turns out to be a wager — that he will make enough to survive when his body is shot, a small pile to tide him over should his courage and nerve leave. "If we had not planted those plums, but peaches instead, same with the no-good grapes, we'd have fifty thousand in the bank, not a hundred and fifty out at the bank," I once told my wearied brother. He at once answered me back: "And when peaches were no good, you'd say the opposite or something else, since who the hell knows what will happen anyway."

And who does?

And finally the farmer is a dilettante plant pathologist, geneticist, biologist, and chemist. No Nobel Prize winner knows all the intricacies of plant production, how exactly and under what precise conditions plants produce food. No agricultural scientist knows the exact — and relative — contributions of weather, soil, air, cultivation, and water that create fruit. No one

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knows, but the farmer alone pays. So he wracks his brain, reads his books, does his own ad hoc interviewing and research to discover just how many pounds of nitrogen, how many acre-feet of water, how much brush to leave, spray to put on, spray to leave off, how many plums to thin, grapes to girdle, in order to produce food on a particular soil, in a particular climate, in a particular place, in a particular year — all on the premises that success then demands exact duplication the next season when none of the variables will be the same, that failure under all circumstances must never be repeated though exactly what caused failure in the first place is never known. A whole lifetime can be consumed in that.

I've taken meaningless degrees and taught 39 different semester classes from Attic Greek composition, Roman history, the origins of war, and advanced Latin grammar, to Sophocles, Sallust, and the *Satyricon*. And I have dutifully chaired worthless tenure committees that have never not tenured anyone, created a classics program *ex nihilo* and watched it sputter, helped to raise three kids, written books, remodeled, replumbed, and rewired the house, been married for over 20 years, engineered a ridiculous 500-foot blockwall, come down with dysentery in the Valley of the Kings and kidney disease in Athens, researched and pontificated about Thucydides, hoplites, and Diodorus's use of Ephorus, and lived under fascism and then again amid socialism for two years in Greece. I even for a while attempted to lecture 50 times out of state about farms, wars, and the poverty of postmodernism. All that so far has turned out to be mostly free of deadly catastrophe.

But for many years just farming trees and vines in Selma, Calif.? Now that was mostly one big ungodly and embarrassing failure.

You see, it was not simple.

Myth 4: Agribusiness "threatens our food supply"

MYTH 4 IS THE PRODUCT of the ecological movement. Slightly Marxist, slightly academic, slightly paranoid, slightly scientific, more often well-meaning, idealistic, and utopian, the theory runs like this: Corporate America has now taken over agriculture (mostly true). Those captains of industry see farming only as a business, where profit is the sole arbiter of all farm activity (mostly true). Consequently, they have developed technologies, chemicals, and practices whose single purpose is not cultural, not community-spirited, not ecological, but entirely commercial (mostly true). The result is that we, the people, are being bombarded with food that is dangerous and soon — due either to corporate conspiracy or to the general collapse of their overly sophisticated system — to be in short supply (mostly untrue).

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Yet the Truth is, of course, more bothersome than the Lie. Americans pay less for food than any citizenry on earth. Americans receive the safest, least infectious food on the planet, which will not kill the great majority of us. Americans have a greater supply and selection of tasteless fresh produce than any people alive. Those facts are indisputable and are true because, not in spite of, enormous complexes of vertically integrated agribusiness consortiums, whose refrigeration and packing plants, trucking, brokerage, and distribution services manage to navigate harvests across a continent of vast expanse in a matter of hours.

Make no mistake about it: Agribusiness is a godless enterprise. It has created an entire industry to create artificial species of fruits and vegetables — produce that is hard, shiny, colorful, will travel, and tastes awful. It enriches a few at the top, disparages wage labor, contributes nothing to the communities in which it thrives, uses cheap food as a mechanism to consolidate market share, seeks to monopolize farmland, receives free government research and subsidy, is inefficient and propped up by mostly hidden government support, pollutes through bribery civil and political discourse, and provides the cheap fuel for the entire American materialist rampage.

Without the low-cost, nutritious, and generally safe food that agribusiness ensures, the welfare system would collapse, there would be no Food-4-Less, and McDonald's would go broke. The world of agrarianism come back from the dead would be quite different and — I am afraid, as it was in the past — hated. Food would be local and in season and far more expensive. No growth hormones and regulators. Farmers' markets would be the norm, not the exception. Not just half a parking lot each week, but acres of them every day. Fruits and vegetables would be riper, with fewer chemicals, and therefore uglier and tastier. Suburbanites would find roadside stands every mile; city street corners would have fruit peddlers. In a Vermont market in April, there would not be watermelons, cherries, and apricots from the Imperial Valley. If it froze in Minnesota in late May, there might not be any local apples for the summer to come.

In turn, smelly and unkempt farmers would be ubiquitous, at the restaurant, in the post office, at the bank. And not just in Iowa or Kansas, but farmers in every community and metropolitan district — they might comprise 10 percent or 15 percent of the population, not less than 1 percent. Without the stranglehold of corporate shipping and distribution, local orchardists, vineyardists, nurserymen, and truck farmers would be strapped to supply their communities in season as supply — subject to local weather and harvest conditions — dictated. Local co-ops would process grains, and they would cost more since farmers would control the land, the mill, and the product until it reached you. No more monopolies that put farmers in the street or in the grave. By the 1990s four cereal companies controlled 80 percent of the market; five grain conglomerates ran 96 percent of all of America's wheat exports. All that would go.

All citizens would listen to local weather reports, worried about unsea-

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sonable frosts and hails, very concerned that their produce might be interrupted or short — with no Florida or California to bail them out, without tons of surplus kiwis, melons, and nectarines available anytime they wished. Young people would want in on this profession, so central to the community, so profitable to the hardworking, so esteemed by the nation. All sorts of local and antiquated varieties of fruits would reappear: delicious apples and plums with unimpressive hues and crusty veneers, fruits of the nineteenth century that become overripe in a matter of hours, that bruise and discolor when picked, that eat well and ship badly.

Under agrarianism, schools (as in my childhood) might start a week later to allow for harvest time labor. No more piano, soccer, and ballet after school; no more Jason and Nicole off to gymnastics instead of picking and shoveling next to Grandpappy until dusk. With farms of 80 to 100 acres everywhere, sons and daughters would tie vines after school; locals without the dole would harvest — and they would pick and prune or not eat. And they would then choose to eat. And so there would be occasional shortages of hands, with no guarantee that 500 men would arrive on specification from Mexico to pick and then be gone the next day, on to the next corporate enterprise. Chemical use on the farm, of course, would be less frequent, as is true now under the few remaining family enterprises. Poison is used less by those who put it on themselves, who have little money, and who are not part of a chain that ensures people in Philadelphia that their nectarines picked Monday in Selma will look absolutely the same back east on Friday.

No more Jason and Nicole off to gymnastics instead of picking and shoveling next to Grandpappy.

In a world without integrated corporate agriculture, without chemical poisons, and without enormous vertically integrated chains of supply and distribution, the produce section of the supermarket would not be open at midnight, and it would not have papayas, guava, bananas, and red grapes in February. There might be three television channels, not 500, given a viewing audience in large part exhausted by shoveling until dusk on their small tidy farms. Given the parochialism of local tight-fisted agrarians, interstate freeways would not slice through five counties at a crack in a perfectly straight line, and so it might take 20 not six hours to drive from Sacramento to Los Angeles — small plodding produce trucks and smoking pickups clogging the lanes as dirt-poor farmers drove down into the L.A. basin each morning to peddle their wares to a waking and hungry Southern California. We would be a more moral, more law-abiding, and more humane society; but that would be so perhaps because we would have a more exhausted, poorer, and immobile citizenry.

Agribusiness, not family farmers, has given us beautiful and plentiful and

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bland and tasteless and mostly safe fruit. You find it in any supermarket in America at any time. The world knows this and so copies not our south 20, with barn, and Gramps on the tractor, but the idea of mile-long rows, and enormous machines, and vertically integrated conglomerates. Agribusiness, not yeomen, makes it possible to have Wheaties in Greece, and Levi's in the Sudan. The Archer Daniels Midland Company and a few like it are probably right in their boasts that they make it wholly probable that 6 billion on the globe can eat cheaply — and so have time and money to experience the banalities of modern culture before they die. This entire life-sustaining multinational enterprise is but one part of a larger seductive appeal to the senses which is surely a world away from the blinkered farmer.

Remember, the family farmer is not even fair or democratic, at least not entirely. While agrarianism functions only within the realm of capitalism, it has always been burdened with an ethical repulsion for the world of commerce; its rote, and tradition, and moral investment do not produce goods and services to the same degree as the corporation. The latter is godless and without memory and not shackled by voices of grandparents in its head — and thus free to lay off, rip out, move on, tear down, or take over as the laws of supply and demand alone dictate. And dictate they must if all of us are to eat and enjoy as we demand.

Agribusiness, not yeomen, makes it possible to have Wheaties in Greece.

Confess it, reader: Agrarianism come back alive would not welcome such huge corporate chains of food, dry goods, and mass entertainment outlets that give us more than we need at cheap prices we can somehow manage to go into hock for, a small tab really for destroying the smug and oh-so-tiny cosmos of local merchants and century-old craftsmen. A culture of agrarians would be uneasy with the demagogic idea of sweeping entitlements and large government intrusion. In short, let us be still more honest: The family farmer has little that those in America need or want. The world of IBM-cloned computers, CDs, and Disney's *Lion King* is what the planet prefers — and that partiality is ultimately quite democratic and gives much to many on demand.

It is in the interest of corporate America to sell goods to everyone who can obtain credit, to everyone of every color and creed, who are united by an entirely color-blind CD player or colorful Gummi Bears, who all alike — and quite democratically — pay the same 16 percent to 19 percent interest on their overdue Visa accounts. Class, like race, like ethnicity and religion, has at last met the democratic juggernaut of global capitalism.

In this brave new vulgar world — which today's pampered critics never understand is ultimately antihierarchical, anticulture itself, and so purely democratic — agribusiness operates. It, not agrarians, ensures food to millions, thereby saving for the Wilsons, Martinezes, Yangs, and Husseins the

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worry of finding rice, porridge, or bread at an affordable price. Only that way can they rent movies, buy a plastic Christmas tree, or get braces and eye tucks at affordable prices. Corporations, at least for a while longer, will continue to produce literally tons of food for us from mile-long fields. Those food factories alone allow Americans to buy peaches for 49 cents a pound, 50-pound bags of rice for a pittance, or cantaloupes three for a dollar at almost anytime and anywhere. Megafarms ensure that tomato paste and soy by-products, cottonseed, cattle offal, pig eyelids, corn syrup, and grape sweeteners are not thrown away, but can be mixed and matched and chemically laden to give us concoctions like Pop-Tarts, Ball Park franks, veggie burgers, and Lucky Charms. Corporations give us vegetables in bright plastic bags and plastic-covered hormone-laden meats that are clean, mostly safe, and bloodless. If it has to feed us, corporate America someday will be able — and quite willing — to recycle our very flesh and bones: corpses freeze-dried, smoked, processed, concentrated, ready to eat or microwaved, hyped on Rush Limbaugh and blared out on MTV, Granny's ears and little Josh's nose ground, puréed, and artificially sweetened into Baby-Bites and Fruits-Are-Us, madman disease or not.

Farmers' natural milk, unprocessed juice, and chops on a hook are more likely to have E. coli *and a fly or two.*

Family farmers, in contrast, slowly and with conversation, put apples in paper bags, hand corn to shoppers with dirty hands, and have insects crawling around their reusable boxes. Again their fruit looks awful and tastes wonderful. In this world the sellers talk not of price but of how they grow food — the entire boring tale of watering, fertilizing, cultivating, and picking it that you have no time to hear while the kids are fighting in the back of the Explorer and the cell phone is two calls backed up. And family farmers do not worry us with toxic soups or chemical residues, but man's age-old nemesis, the bacterium, is not entirely eradicated from their produce. Farmers' natural milk, unprocessed juice, and chops on a hook are more likely to have *E. coli* and a fly or two.

So give agribusiness its due. Yes, it helped to destroy the agrarian profile. Its onset wiped out thousands of small towns and communities. Corporate farming obliterated the entire rural culture that was once America, and for better or worse, was integral to the appearance of the uniquely American twentieth-century material appetite. It took hardworking, dirtied, and dutiful underpaid sons and daughters off the land and into suits, air-conditioned offices, and real money. Latifundia brought to farming huge, horrific machines, an army of accountants, brokers, and bankers that hated the idea of a bumpkin ploughing on his granddad's 20. It equated the use of the land with the worst corruption of the human spirit. Corporate agriculture did all that and more still that we will only come to learn of later.

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But agribusiness has not yet given America food that is immediately dangerous, scarce, or expensive. It has not yet forced down the gullet of America anything it did not want. Farm preservationists and agrarian activists are right to want the Lie and to hate the Truth. But finally they must be honest and so must acknowledge the Truth: Agribusiness is dangerous and frightening, not because it has failed, but because it has succeeded beyond our wildest expectations.

Myth 5: Farming is "timeless"

We read, see, and hear that agriculture is of great antiquity, a timeless part of the human experience itself. It is not. Our final myth of agricultural perpetuity also derives from the back-to-nature movement, or perhaps even from the anthropocentric idea that all of nature exists for and is defined by us. But man is very old, and nature is older still, and agriculture is very young — and so there is no reason to believe that farming will always continue as it has or at all. Man has inhabited this planet for over a million years, homo sapiens perhaps for the last 200,000 seasons. Cultivated crops on any scale and true agriculture have but a 7,000 to 10,000-year pedigree, one coterminous with civilization itself.

My point? Simply that for most of the life of the human species, there was no such thing as agriculture, as is true even still with a few indigenous tribes today. When such a premise is accepted, then its logical corollary is apparent as well: Just as agriculture is a relatively recent development, and not essential to human survival, so too it can disappear and not end man's continuance on the planet.

The link between farming and mankind is not survival but rather civilization. Man can live on without agriculture. But civilization, likewise a late and frail phenomenon, cannot. For man to be stable and fixed, to form populous communities, to have surpluses (Aristotle's material safeguards so necessary for the life of contemplation and intellect), to be literate and to be lawful, he must grow food, which in turns ties him to the soil, to one place as it teaches him what property and culture really are.

To the Greeks, the polis was simply a reflection of a stationary and landed populace who grew food and planted permanent crops — in antithesis to Scythians, Thracians, and other nomads who hunted, fished, raided, plundered, trapped, and traded, but did not have a permanent agriculture and thus no civilization as the Greeks knew it. No wonder that the Cyclopses, Satyrs, Centaurs, Amazons, and all the other monsters of Greek mythology are creatures of lawless disorder who have one common and feral bond: They do not farm. No wonder that when Odysseus meets Polyphemus, Calypso, Circe, the Lotus Eaters, Scylla, and Charybdis, he meets humanlike creatures of assorted shapes and sizes who as nonfarmers are kindred in their uncivilized states. No wonder that when Thucydides at the beginning

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of his monumental history wishes to emphasize the barbarity of early prepolis Greek civilization, he says merely that "they planted no trees or vines." His readers, of course, would have nodded in their agreement. Farming, then, arose late in human history, and with it civilization. But will it always continue?

Of course, there are apocalyptic scenarios for agricultural demise — nuclear exchange on a global level, chemical pollution of the atmosphere, or epidemics of strange new plant viruses. Alarmists, in theory, could be right that productive but genetically vulnerable hybrid species, together with a growing dependence on a few technicians and petrochemicals, could make food factories vulnerable in the next century to such unforeseen challenges. We could also soon die prematurely at middle age due to chemically laden food. But it is unlikely — that food production itself will cease and that mankind, in vastly reduced numbers, will be forced to return to our pre-state origins as a roving society of a few thousand hunters and gatherers.

The hour is late for the American farmer, and what is needed is not romance.

Far more likely, agribusiness will thrive and thus ensure that food making in some form will continue even as actual knowledge of farming exists among fewer and fewer people. Even now in this country, no more than a million or so Americans if turned loose know how to produce enough food to feed their peers at present levels of population and material comfort. If our past is any guide to the American character, it is likely that corporate enterprises of the next century will be devoted to creating even more food — will that be the proper word for it? — under more efficient and sure circumstances: meaning less human or animal involvement, and more predictability in a realm beyond soil, weather, or muscular labor. The industrial science of mass fabrication of food, which has a pedigree of only a few decades, will accelerate, but the age-old craft of what the Romans called *agricultura* will erode.

Agriculture, after all, means not food production, but "the culture of the soil." And I see no assurance that in the millennium to come, food-producing plants will be grown in the "soil" or that there will even be such plants, much less their "culture" — much less farmhouses, rural communities, and families tied to particular parcels of land. With the disappearance of this culture, the question then arises: Will there be civilization as well?

Yes, there probably will be a complexity in the sense of a sophisticated urban landscape and a specialized workforce. But will it be a civilization we are proud of?

The hour is late for the American farmer, and what is needed is not more romance and mythology but a truth that is often brutal and offers little comfort to anyone. Farming, always difficult, dirty, and sometimes deadly, is now even more so, given years of static commodity prices: Farmers must

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work harder for less money, and they feel and show that struggle. Farmers, always curt and blunt due to their solitary existence, are even more so now, given their vanishing numbers and the truth that they are failing and going broke as millions of Americans thrive as never before. Farmers, always harried and versatile, are even more so now, as they are forced to be accountants, tax specialists, mechanics, computer-literate, and conversant with zoning and environmental laws, as well as age-old growers of food.

In contrast, agribusiness is not more complicated, not more vulnerable, and not more at odds with contemporary America than are family farmers. The corporatization of food is simple and operates on a single truth: There is no money in growing harvests, but a great deal in packaging them, shipping them, and selling them. Invulnerable is the conglomerate that can do all three. It can lose money from growing food and profit enormously on getting it to you. Its upper- and mid-level employees, with health benefits, retirement plans, and usually clean and comfortable workplaces, are polite, kind, and relaxed folk more to America's tastes than farmers, who have no money or time for such things. They have been busy, we must remember, going broke, growing only food.

It is easy — and becoming an unconscious and natural part of the American character — to develop housing tracts from farmland, to shop at the supermarket produce section, and to eat anything at any time while romanticizing from afar the man with the hoe; but it is hard to curb our appetites, buy direct and in season, and keep the countryside pristine to benefit someone illiberal and bothersome in our midsts. We wish to make the farmer like the suburbanite in appearance, behavior, and ideology when he is assuredly not; and then, and only then, save him on the cheap and in the abstract. But far more honest and difficult it would be to confess the truth about his nature and then rescue him in the concrete.

Family farmers are not more moral than people in town; and what they do is no longer essential to the life of the nation. America will continue to be free, rich, and democratic long after they are gone. But they are different and they are a link with America's past that brought us the very bounty we take for granted, or worse, sometimes despise. You off the farm are not truthful in claiming farmers to be saintly and invaluable; and we are more dishonest than you for basking in that romance. You in town should like us for offending, not pleasing, you; for not wishing to be like you; for that is ultimately for your own good. And you farmers, as you vanish, should not claim that you are not disappearing, or that your disappearance will destroy what your country has become. If anything, you should cease your myth-making and must feel proud, not ashamed, that you are bothersome, direct, unchanging, and so, in your eleventh hour, entirely and forever at odds with all that which you are not.

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BOOKS

Richard Rorty, Liberal Absolutist

By DAMON LINKER

RICHARD RORTY. *Philosophy and Social Hope*. PENGUIN BOOKS. 288 PAGES. $13.95.

WHEN ARISTOTLE asserted that "man is a political animal," he meant many things. But above all he wished to draw our attention to the fact that man alone possesses the capacity to (in his words) perceive "good and evil, the just and unjust, and other similar qualities." And indeed, human history seems to support Aristotle in his suggestion that certain moral categories are coeval with political — that is, human — life. What we mean by such terms as good and evil, just and unjust might change considerably from time to time and place to place, but their use is unavoidable. Even Hitler justified his policies in terms of their goodness and justice.

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And this forces us to confront a further dimension of Aristotle's insight: Each of the competing appeals to goodness and justice that arise within political life claims to reflect the *truth* of the moral order of things. We testify to our intuitive awareness of this fact when we feel it in our bones that Hitler's policies were simply evil, regardless of how he might have tried to justify them. In such cases, we do not mean that his policies merely violated "our" standards. Rather, we mean that those policies failed to correspond to or reflect goodness and justice as they exist in themselves, independent of human thought and action. For this reason, philosophers throughout the history of the West have considered it to be obvious that politics is an activity that is inseparable from the question of truth in moral matters.

That is, until Richard Rorty. In a series of books beginning with *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979), Rorty has attained an astonishing degree of notoriety for a philosophy professor by consistently opposing what he calls "Platonism," or the view that our ideas about the world correspond to some fundamental reality that exists independently of those ideas. As he writes in *Philosophy and Social Hope* — his most accessible collection of essays to date — "we have to give up on the idea that there are unconditional, transcultural moral obligations rooted in an unchanging, ahistorical human nature." Rejecting virtually the entire tradition of Western philosophy as little more than a series of dogmatic attempts to reach an imaginary timeless truth, Rorty wonders "why philosophers . . . [are] still arguing inconclusively, tramping round and round the

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same dialectical circles" when they could choose, like himself, to become "pragmatists" instead. According to Rorty's idiosyncratic version of the pragmatism of William James and John Dewey, the problems that have motivated the philosophical tradition were "made" by individuals like Plato and Aristotle rather than "found" in the human condition as such. And since they were "made," they can also be "unmade" simply by coming to employ "a different vocabulary than that which the philosophical tradition has used."

Rorty has been accused of many things over the years — from relativism and irresponsibility to opportunism and complacency — by critics on the right and far left.

In making philosophical arguments against the supposed dogmatism of the philosophical tradition, Rorty is by no means alone. A distinguished line of European thinkers from Nietzsche and Heidegger to Foucault and Derrida have pursued similar projects. What sets Rorty apart from his predecessors is his politics. Whereas most of those who have espoused kindred ideas have tended either to be virulently antiliberal and antidemocratic in political orientation (like Nietzsche and Heidegger) or to practice a strangely antipolitical form of radical cultural politics (like Foucault, Derrida, and their many "postmodern" admirers in the American academy today), Rorty is emphatically a man of the liberal left. And it is very clear — in *Philosophy and Social Hope* as much as it was in 1998's *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thoughts in Twentieth-Century America* — that he thinks his anti-Platonic pragmatism is compatible with and even provides a theoretical counterpart to his politics.

Now it is certainly tempting to dismiss Rorty's project of transforming the greatest representatives of European nihilism into liberal Democrats. And indeed, Rorty has been accused of many things over the years — from relativism and irresponsibility to opportunism and complacency — by critics on the right and far left, as he recounts in the charming autobiographical essay with which he opens his latest book. But we would be mistaken to ignore Rorty and his political position. For his work is arguably of great importance, and not merely because he is very smart and writes clever, self-deprecating essays that are widely read. Rorty's work is worthy of attention primarily because it is so much a product of its time — our time — a time in which the liberalism of earlier generations has been subject to severe and sustained criticism on empirical, moral, religious, and even aesthetic grounds. To employ the common sense moral categories introduced above, considerable efforts have been made to show that what liberalism claims to be good and just is, in fact, neither. Given this situation, there

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would seem to be two options for liberals: Either they could seek to defend themselves against the charges brought against them or they could abandon liberal ideology in favor of some version of conservatism or radicalism.

Rorty's work is noteworthy precisely because it refuses either of these alternatives. Instead, Rorty sets out on a "third way" that is unique to the history of liberal thought. That is, he espouses a form of liberalism that steadfastly refuses to defend its own goodness and justice, and which even seeks to draw strength from this refusal. Freely admitting that "I do not know how to give anything like a conclusive argument for the view [I hold]," and denying that there can be anything like a "legitimizing principle lurking behind" our actions and beliefs, Rorty nevertheless continues to hold to his left-liberal views, clinging to them *as if* he possessed such an argument or principle. And in doing so, Rorty presents us with the specter of liberalism as a closed ideology beyond the reach of rational criticism. Whether this shows that, in Rorty's hands, liberalism has entered its death throes or has, paradoxically, experienced an unanticipated rebirth of vigor is an open question.

In many ways, Rorty's political views are as banal as they come — nothing other than unreconstructed McGovernism. As he writes, "what matters" for a pragmatist like himself is "devising ways of diminishing human suffering and increasing human equality, increasing the ability of all children to start life with an equal chance of happiness." In case we fail to see the public policy implications of these goals, Rorty gives us a remarkable essay entitled "Looking Backwards from the Year 2096" in which he imagines what kind of future awaits America in the twenty-first century. As a piece of left-liberal agitprop in the guise of utopian science fiction, the brief essay would have been enough to make even Gene Roddenberry blush. It seems that, a century from now, the United States will have finally learned that "the first duty of the state is to prevent gross economic and social inequality," as opposed to insuring "only" that individuals enjoy "equal protection of the law." As a consequence of this development, workers will enjoy a minimum wage of approximately $12 an hour in 1996 dollars, "talk of fraternity and unselfishness" will have replaced "talk of rights," and citizens will be plagued by an overwhelming sense of "shame at having much when others have little." Whereas the government today feels the need to inculcate a sense of "personal responsibility" in individuals, by 2096 the state will have left behind such outmoded ideals and come, instead, to encourage fellow-feeling and the ability of individuals to sympathize with the plight of others. To be sure, this future America will be an "isolationist, unambitious, and middle-grade nation," but the country will have thereby acquired "humility" and a healthy "sense of fragility, of susceptibility to the vicissitudes of time and chance."

Thus Rorty's liberal fantasy ends with America luxuriating in its mediocrity. Perhaps not since Herbert Marcuse's least level-headed moments has a writer of the left expressed his hopes so purely and with so little self-consciousness. Sure, conservatives have

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always suspected that it is such visions that keep liberals warm during the long, cold nights of their exile from political power. But it's been a long time since an author has dared to wear his bleeding heart on his sleeve in mixed company with such palpable pride.

And yet, what makes Rorty's political views so surprising is not their unabashed sentimentality or the fact that, published years after a Democratic president announced that the "era of big government is over," they are an anachronistic echo of a bygone age. Rather, what's astonishing about Rorty's political positions is that he offers no defense of them whatsoever — and that this principled refusal to appeal to principle actually emboldens him to advocate the subversion of all views of goodness and justice that compete with the liberal cause. In this, he resembles Peter Singer, the controversial Princeton University "ethicist" whose absolutist utilitarianism leads him to run roughshod over common sense moral opinions and intuitions by condoning infanticide at the same time that he defends animal rights. In Rorty's case, all non-liberal views must be rejected if they do not contribute to realizing "greater human happiness" for the species as a whole. And since "the benefits of modern astronomy and space travel" clearly outweigh those of, say, Christian fundamentalism, we must learn to "slough off" the latter as useless "baggage" that will only slow down the march of progress.

If this sounds intolerant, that's because it is. The doctrine of tolerance advocated by classical liberals like Locke and Montesquieu, Madison and Jefferson was devised in order to ensure that individuals who held to divergent notions of goodness and justice could live together in peace despite their differences. Tolerance does not require that those individuals share identical goals in life. In fact, it presupposes the opposite; one allows people to adhere to their views despite one's belief that those views are wrong. Hence, in a tolerant society, the only thing on which various individuals and groups have to agree is that peace and stability are preferable to civil war and tyranny, and thus that none of our disagreements about the truth of our competing views of goodness and justice warrant the persecution or forcible conversion of one another.

But Rorty is not a classical liberal. He is, instead, a "philosophical pluralist." And a philosophical pluralist differs from an advocate of tolerance in at least one crucial respect: The pluralist denies that, strictly speaking, any of the competing views of goodness and justice that prevail in a free society is true. This is how Rorty tries to get around the charge that his dismissal of Christian fundamentalism is intolerant — by denying that truth is at stake between a pious believer and a scientist. As he writes in a representative sentence, "the argument between us and our medieval ancestors should not be about which of us has got the universe right." Instead, we should simply ask which of the two views is a more "useful tool" for bringing about greater happiness in the world. Once we do so, we will clearly see that the modern scientific worldview is more worthy of our devotion than, for example, the pre-modern notion of a "great chain of

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being," and thus that we need not try to "reconcile one's regular attendance at Mass with one's work as an evolutionary biologist." For each practice and cluster of beliefs merely arises from different "areas of culture and serves different purposes," and each of those purposes simply requires that we employ "different tools."

To be sure, for most of us it matters deeply whether man was created in the image of God or evolved from lifelessness over the course of billions of years. But Rorty claims it doesn't matter to him and he makes it very clear that in his liberal utopia it wouldn't matter to anyone else either. In Rorty's ideal world, no one would ever face an intractable problem that inspires deep reflection or confront a contradiction that cries out for resolution. Beliefs would be tried on and taken off like so many articles of clothing in a wardrobe of moral, religious, and scientific perspectives, the truth of any one of which is a matter of unconcern.

Does this make Rorty a relativist, as so many of his critics have claimed? On the contrary. As anyone reading his new book will note, Rorty's work is filled with statements that reveal that his stated indifference with regard to the truth is based on a set of barely submerged convictions about the truth of any number of issues. For instance, Rorty is a self-described atheist for whom religion is at best an annoying "conversation-stopper" and at worst a "dangerous" obstacle to the attainment of the goal of universal happiness and fraternity — a goal, by the way, that he considers to be "worth dying for." That is, at least at some points in his book. At others, his project is described as a "worthy" one for no other reason than that "we have nothing better to do with our lives." But one gets the feeling that he is being more honest with himself and readers when he writes in the book's final sentence, "utopian social hope . . . is still the noblest imaginative creation of which we have record."

Is there a God who exists independently of human longings for immortal-

Beliefs would be tried on and taken off like so many articles of clothing in a wardrobe of moral, religious, and scientific perspectives, the truth of any one of which is a matter of unconcern.

ity? Is a goal like the one Rorty articulates *really* worth dying for? *Do* we indeed have nothing better to do with our lives than pursue Rorty's project? Is the conception of utopian social hope that Rorty articulates in his writings *truly* noble? However we may choose to answer these questions — each one of which forces us to ponder the truth about the order of things that prevails in the world around us — there can be no doubt that Rorty has answered them and that it is only in the light of these answers that he has developed the characteristic stance of indifference that some mistake for relativism. Far from being a genuine relativist, Rorty is actu-

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ally a liberal absolutist. And that is why his conservative critics are right to sense that his ideas are a considerable threat. For whereas the toleration of classical liberalism leaves competing views of justice and goodness largely intact, Rorty's pragmatic liberalism — like the "neutrality" pursued with such partisan zeal by the ACLU — actively seeks to remake those views in its own image of the good, the just, and the true.

Refusing to admit that his views about politics, like everyone else's, are meant to be an accurate description of the world as it is in itself, Rorty studiously avoids having to face and respond to criticism of those views. Instead, he merely "changes the conversation," to employ his preferred turn of phrase. In this, his manner of argument resembles the Marxist appeal to "false consciousness," according to which all views that seem to disprove the validity of Marx's predictions are summarily dismissed as examples of exactly the forms of thinking that will be overthrown in the imminent revolution. But there is an important difference between Marx and Rorty. Because Marxism was meant to be an accurate description of the world, it was, unlike Rorty's views, ultimately vulnerable to being refuted by reality, as it eventually was by the late 1980s. Rorty's "pragmatism," on the other hand, makes no claim to truth and is thus in a very real sense irrefutable. What remains to be seen is whether today's liberals will be tempted by Rorty's promise of invincibility — if, confronted with increasing evidence that their beliefs do not accurately represent reality, they will be willing to purchase the survival of their liberalism at the cost of becoming inmates in the prison of their ideas.

Do-gooders and Double Standards

By JOHN PODHORETZ

JOHN B. JUDIS. *The Paradox of American Democracy: Elites, Special Interests, and the Betrayal of Public Trust*. PANTHEON BOOKS. 320 PAGES. $26.00.

BACK IN THE DAYS when the most popular self-help business book was called *The One-Minute Manager,* some of my friends devised a game of conversational one-upsmanship we called "The One-Minute Intellectual." All you had to do to play "The One-Minute Intellectual" was take some idle but interesting notion that had just occurred to you and spin it into an impossibly grand theory that would actually require years of research and hundreds of pages to prove true. For example: The post-modern age began with the possibility of the destruction of all human life on the planet. Or: The impulse to cut historical figures down to size is a product of the collapse of the mass and the rise of individualism.

You can always make these theories sound good — for one minute. After a minute, you can't overcome the realiza-

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tion that they're essentially silly, or vague, or logically inconsistent, and just as quickly as you've tried to convince your fellow one-minute intellectuals you've had the first really new idea about something in years, you discard it and move onto the next.

The "One-Minute Intellectual" game is a self-conscious parody of honest and genuine intellection. For what intellectuals do, after all, is work with ideas the way mechanics work with engines or a sculptor works with clay. They play with them, try them out, take them apart, put them back together and throw away the scraps and the leavings.

Properly understood, the term "intellectual" is not a designation of honor but merely a description of a type of worker who makes his living by producing thoughts and then explaining them. Just as there are good and bad mechanics, there are competent intellectuals and incompetent intellectuals.

John B. Judis has just produced a book called *The Paradox of American Democracy* that demonstrates what happens when an idea-worker doesn't discard a notion best suited for a ripping round of "The One-Minute Intellectual." It clearly began with Judis saying to himself, "You know, there's a lot of talk about how bad elites are, but they've done a lot of good in this country, only not in the way people think."

He should have left it there and moved on to the next idle thought. But instead Judis raised foundation money, took time off from work, and devoted a good deal of energy to producing a volume of political philosophy that reveals him to be an intellectual of uncommon incompetence. *The Paradox of American Democracy* retells the entire history of the United States in the twentieth century as a struggle between competing ideas propounded by members of the American elite. That is an unexceptionable, though very broad, point. Judis seems intent on saving the word "elite" from the pejorative connotation first assigned to it by the radical sociologist C. Wright Mills, author of *The Power Elite* — and more recently by populists like Patrick J. Buchanan, with whom Judis is now making common cause.

Judis seems intent on saving the word "elite" from the pejorative connotation first assigned to it by the radical sociologist C. Wright Mills, author of The Power Elite *— and more recently by populists like Patrick J. Buchanan.*

But in *The Paradox of American Democracy,* some ideas are more equal than others. According to Judis, when elites join together to promote income redistribution and wholesale political change, they are doing so in a disinterested way based on solid social-science research — or they're trying to help "distribute power downward," which

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he seems to think is the same thing. Case in point: the head of the Ford Foundation in the 1960s and '70s, McGeorge Bundy. Fresh from helping to embroil the United States in the Vietnam War as John Kennedy's national security advisor, Bundy cleansed himself of any such taint at the Ford Foundation because, Judis writes approvingly, "he considered himself above considerations of class and faction." Which is to say, he used the Ford Foundation's money to get himself right with the Democratic left by offering massive funding to radical groups and causes.

Similarly, the circle of New Deal thinkers who emerged from Felix Frankfurter's Harvard Law School classes was not an ideological clique seeking to cure the ills of the Depression with socialist solutions, but rather a sober crew of thinkers who examined the evidence and came to the reasonable conclusion that massive income redistribution and a system of controls on large corporations were the only way out of America's economic bind.

And the Naderite effort during the Carter years to create "a new federal office of consumer representation that would consolidate all the different government consumer departments, represent consumers before federal agencies and courts, and conduct research on their behalf" was simply a reformist measure based on the need to level the playing field between individual Americans and the K Street lobbyists who control Washington. Nope, nothing ideological here — even though in the very next sentences Judis writes, "Nader and the unions also backed tax reform that would remove the loopholes for oil profits, capital gains and overseas profits" and "supported a national health insurance bill."

What Nader and the unions were seeking, in other words, was an intrusion into the functioning of the free market that would make Sweden look like Singapore. And in Judis's One-Minute Intellectual fantasy, it all would have passed in Congress too, were it not for the work of the bad guys who cause the paradox of the book's title.

For when elites gather to propound an idea of which Judis does not approve — which is to say, any conservative free-market idea — they are doing so merely to promote the interests of "capitalism." They are not working to better their country, but are serving instead to maximize profits, hurt workers, and enrich "corporations" — a word used in *The Paradox of American Democracy* in the same contemptuous way the term "Muggles" is used in the Harry Potter books to describe the selfish and blind bourgeoisie from which young Harry has fortunately escaped.

As JUDIS TELLS IT, the evidence these bad elites adduce to support their arguments is inevitably flawed and distorted. Worse still, unlike the Harvard boys who sat at Frankfurter's feet, their academic credentials are just not up to par! Judis uses as one key example Murray Weidenbaum, later the chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers in the Reagan administration. Weidenbaum "was far from being a leader in his profession," Judis sneers, because after getting his Ph.D. he worked as a "corporate researcher . . . he was the economist as lobbyist." And

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then Weidenbaum had the temerity to teach at Washington University. That's in St. Louis, Mo. How awful.

What's even worse, Weidenbaum took money from elite foundations to promote conservative economic ideas. These foundations were not noble, like the Ford Foundation. Because they supported free-market ideas, they were serving the interests of the corporatist profit-making structure. And when Weidenbaum issued a pioneering study in 1978 on the hidden cost of regulation, Judis says his work "was open to obvious objections." Such as? Well, "its purpose appeared to be overtly political." Which is to say, it sought to affect the debate on Capitol Hill about the danger of regulation.

Oh, foul Weidenbaum! Peter, Paul and Mary would never sing of thee!

What's more, the bad guys use the magical tools of corporate public relations to seduce the American people into believing the wrong things about capitalism. It happened in the 1920s, when in Judis's fantasy the labor movement should have gathered strength but failed to do so because business had learned during World War I how to control public opinion. He quotes Edward Bernays, the supposed father of the PR business, as saying, "As civilization has become more complex, the technical means have been invented and developed by which opinion may be regimented." (Tell that to the makers of Pepsi Clear, New Coke, or the billions of other products and ideas that have not exactly compelled public opinion to fall into lockstep. Just because Bernays was Siegmund Freud's nephew doesn't mean he was right about everything — or anything, for that matter.)

Seventy years later, in Judis's ludicrous retelling of a very recent tale, the same techniques were deployed to turn the American people against the Clinton health care plan. Initially, this plan, devised by one of those elite groups Judis likes — the Ira Magaziner group, which marshaled lots of evidence to prove that the government

As Judis tells it, the evidence these bad elites adduce to support their arguments is inevitably flawed and distorted. Worse still, unlike the Harvard boys, their academic credentials are just not up to par!

should step in and take control of one-seventh of the U.S. economy — was so clearly in the national interest that 70 percent of the public supported it. But then the evil corporations stepped in. They aired the famous "Harry and Louise" commercials — which were probably seen by, in all, a few million people — and their representatives gathered on Wednesday mornings at the Washington offices of Grover G. Norquist. By the time their sorcery was concluded, the Clinton health care plan had collapsed. "In the past," Judis writes sorrowfully, "elites within the

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business community had intervened to prevent the most venal interests from dominating Congress." But this time, there were "no comparable organizations and no comparable leadership that would have rescued health care reform from oblivion."

The fact that the Clinton health care plan was a lousy and unpopular idea once the public began to understand its true purpose — which was the result of honest education as well as propaganda — had nothing to do with it, of course. Indeed, though Judis pays obeisance to the power of ideas, he actually has no respect for them. He believes that money trumps ideas, that capitalism always wins when it gets motivated, that there is no hope for the working man in the face of the ceaseless march of the almighty dollar.

What he is, most of all, is a sentimentalist of a very dated stripe. Judis equates any improvement in the lot of ordinary Americans with the strength of the labor movement in this country. Though *The Paradox of American Democracy* is written in a prose style that might kindly be described as dull, it's animated by a deep sentimentality for the iconography of the Old Left. Confronted with a sentence like this, you can practically hear a scratchy Pete Seeger recording of "Joe Hill" playing in the background: "The rise of corporate capitalism had undermined the power of the individual citizen to affect history. The ordinary worker, forced to sell his labor power to a large company, was no match for the managers and financiers of the new capitalism."

The "worker"! And what of the worker today — the one in an employee stock-ownership plan, the one who has found it possible in the 1990s to find employment with no difficulty, the one who is moving steadily or maybe rapidly up? That worker is of no interest to John B. Judis, who pays lip service to the post-industrial economy but whose image of the way ordinary Americans do their jobs is still redolent of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. (There was a fire there. In 1911.)

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LETTERS

Humanitarian War

SIR, — In "Humanitarian Hawks?" (December 1999/January 2000), Adam Wolfson criticizes mainstream Democratic thinking at the time of the Persian Gulf crisis and war. He is surely right that the votes of congressional Democrats, the vast majority of whom opposed using force to liberate Kuwait in early 1991, were mistaken. However, he is wrong to implicitly explain the votes of Democrats like Sam Nunn and Bill Bradley with reference to columns appearing in the *New York Review of Books* or written by Anna Quindlen. Even though these senators were in the end proven wrong, in my judgment at least, there was an intelligent case to be made at the time for a more patient strategy of sanctions and containment. Those who dismiss such strategies out of hand seem to forget that they are largely what won the Cold War.

Wolfson also fails to note that, if there were war again in the Persian Gulf or the Korean peninsula, Democrats would surely support the use of force. The Clinton administration has based its military strategy around the possibility of needing to fight Iraq and North Korea simultaneously, and has proven during crises with both that it would use force if necessary. Democrats may not always get it right the first time, but Wolfson should give them credit for learning from past mistakes.

Wolfson's main purpose, however, is not to debate Iraq and Kuwait, but the war over Kosovo. Here he has many useful insights — even if he is fundamentally wrong to suggest that NATO was to blame for the escalation of Serb atrocities during its bombing campaign. He also fails to mention the fact that Milosevic had driven nearly half a million Kosovar Albanians from their homes the year before NATO bombs fell — and of course that he had inspired and supported massacres in Bosnia that took more than 100,000 lives. Why Wolfson wants to imply that Milosevic's treatment of the Kosovars would have been benign in 1999 and thereafter, had NATO only stayed on the sidelines of the conflict, is unclear.

Wolfson criticizes me for suggesting that the United States and like-minded countries should try to stop massive losses of human life whenever possible. Although he calls my thinking "ludicrous," it is not that different from how the United States has made decisions about humanitarian intervention in the past decade (including during the Bush administration). We ultimately did intervene, in one way or another, in response to wars or major civil violence in Somalia, Bosnia, Haiti, Kosovo, and (far too late) Rwanda. I would also have advocated intervention in Sudan, where war-related famine has killed about 2 million in the past two decades, most of them in the Christian south of the country. They could have been protected at modest risk and cost by an international presence effectively dividing the country into two halves. I would also have supported intervention in Liberia, where ragtag militia groups killed about as many people as died in Bosnia, and could have been stopped

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without large losses to foreign troops. In at least one of these conflicts, the United States would probably not have had to send combat troops; helping allies with logistics and transportation would have sufficed.

In other words, my proposal, while admittedly ambitious and contentious, is not grandiose. Nor is it divorced from the realities of politics and military analysis. In fact, I rule out a number of interventions, even in situations where many people are dying (e.g., Chechnya, North Korea) because they would be too dangerous or too likely to fail.

But let me agree with Wolfson's final point: I have no problem justifying these types of military interventions in terms of American ideals. And I too believe that it is desirable to appeal to American patriotism when carrying them out. Some on the left may not agree with me, but I do not like being lumped in with all Democrats any more than Wolfson would wish to be grouped with all conservatives. Wolfson may be spoiling for an ideological fight, but if so, he is punching at a straw man of his own construction.

Michael O'Hanlon
Senior Fellow
Brookings Institution
Washington, D.C.

The Author Responds,

I would like to thank Michael O'Hanlon for his comments, though I'm not sure why raising serious questions about the aims of America's foreign policy makes me an ideologue. So much for a serious debate about the issues. And I'm not sure why raising questions about the effectiveness of our bombing campaign — something I did only in passing and that many have done more thoroughly — implies that I think "Milosevic's treatment of the Kosovars would have been benign" had we stayed on the sidelines. I imply no such thing. That Milosevic had blood on his mind, there can be little doubt.

O'Hanlon confirms his support for U.S. humanitarian interventions in Somalia, Bosnia, Haiti, Kosovo, Rwanda, Sudan, and Liberia. Why not in East Timor or Sierra Leone where innocent civilians in the thousands were murdered? The desire to do something is understandable, but O'Hanlon offers no sensible guide for distinguishing where we should send American troops from where we should not. The result is that he would have us intervene almost everywhere. If that is not "grandiose" I don't know what is.

I hope O'Hanlon is right that Democrats have learned the lessons of Iraq. And I hope also that in the future our humanitarian impulses — admirable, to be sure — are disciplined by an enlightened patriotism.

Adam Wolfson
Washington, D.C.

Health in Russia

Sir, — In a very interesting paper ("Russia: Too Sick to Matter?" June/July 1999), Nicholas Eberstadt analyzes the severe deterioration of public health in the Russian Federation and prospects for its recovery. In the annus horribilis 1994, life expectancy of Russian men was almost 20 years behind Japan, Hong Kong, and some European countries.[1] Premature mor-

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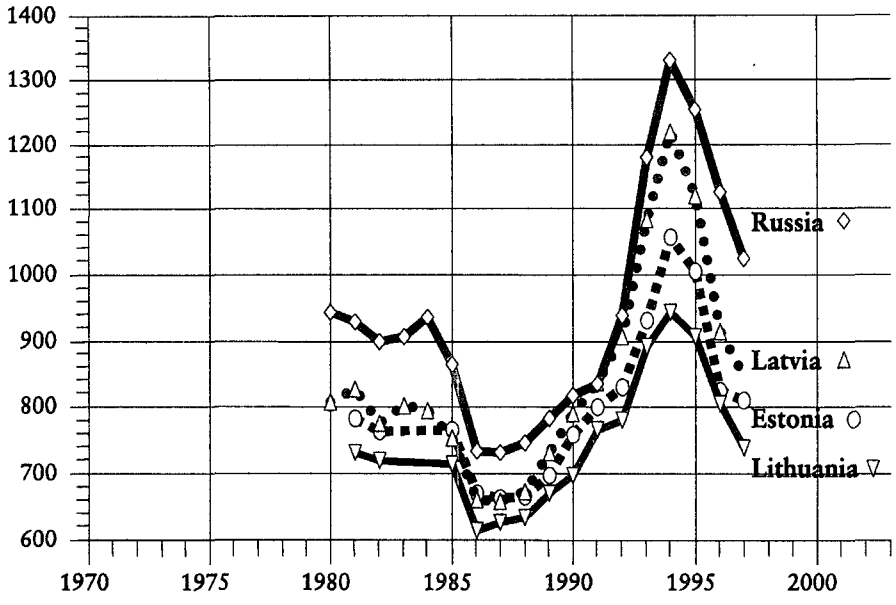
FIGURE 1
Trends in total premature mortality in Russian, Latvian, Estonian, and Lithuanian males



tality caused by cardiovascular diseases and by accidents and other adverse effects in Russia in 1994 reached levels unprecedented in human history. The cardiovascular epidemic is only partially explainable by the high prevalence of the traditional risk factors, i.e. high cholesterol and high blood pressure levels. The international WHO project MONICA Finnish/Russian and Swedish/Lithuanian surveys have shown that, with the significant exception of male smokers, there were no substantial differences in the prevalence of traditional risk factors between Eastern Europe and democratic countries.[2]

The failure of the economic and political system to satisfy material and psychosocial needs of the population may have been an important factor in the cardiovascular disease epidemic in Eastern Europe. Antioxidant deficiencies, alcoholism, and psychosocial stress might have become "new" cardiovascular risk factors in Eastern Europe.[3] Probably, the dark corners of the Russian soul, as ingeniously described by Dostoyevski more than a hundred years ago, have nowadays found their reflection in the vascular system of the former USSR's population, tired and plagued by the terror of long years, by war, by chronic disturbances in the supply of public goods, and by economic chaos. Alcoholism the Russian way (frequent bouts of drinking low-quality booze to get stoned out of one's squash) evidently played a key role in the epidemic of cardiovascular mortality as well as in the numbers of accidents, injuries, intoxications, suicides, and murders.

Western authors, including

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Eberstadt, are rather skeptical when it comes to Russia's prospects for health recovery, because "the trends in deaths from heart diseases can never turn on a dime." However, Russia is an unpredictable country. There was an unexpected break, a sudden drop in mortality from cardiovascular reasons and from accidents in 1994, and this has been a continual phenomenon prevailing through today. Figure 1, based on recent WHO data, provides evidence that this is not a mistake made by Russian pathologists or statisticians: An entirely identical trend of *overall premature mortality* can be seen in the three former Soviet Baltic republics. There must have been a change in the overall social situation in the three countries, since the same break can be traced with respect to mortality from accidents and unwanted intoxications, as well as in the numbers of homicides and suicides.

There is no method enabling reliable estimation of the actual consumption of alcohol in Russia, since alcohol is being smuggled to this country on a large scale and nobody can count the heaps of hectoliters of "moonshine" produced. Nevertheless, there are some more reliable data showing the incidence of alcoholic psychoses in Russia which almost parallel the trends in premature mortality in men from heart and blood vessel diseases (see Figure 2). We need the answer to the question of what has caused such an unexpected

FIGURE 2

Parallelism between premature cardiovascular mortality and prevalence of alcoholic psychoses in Russian men

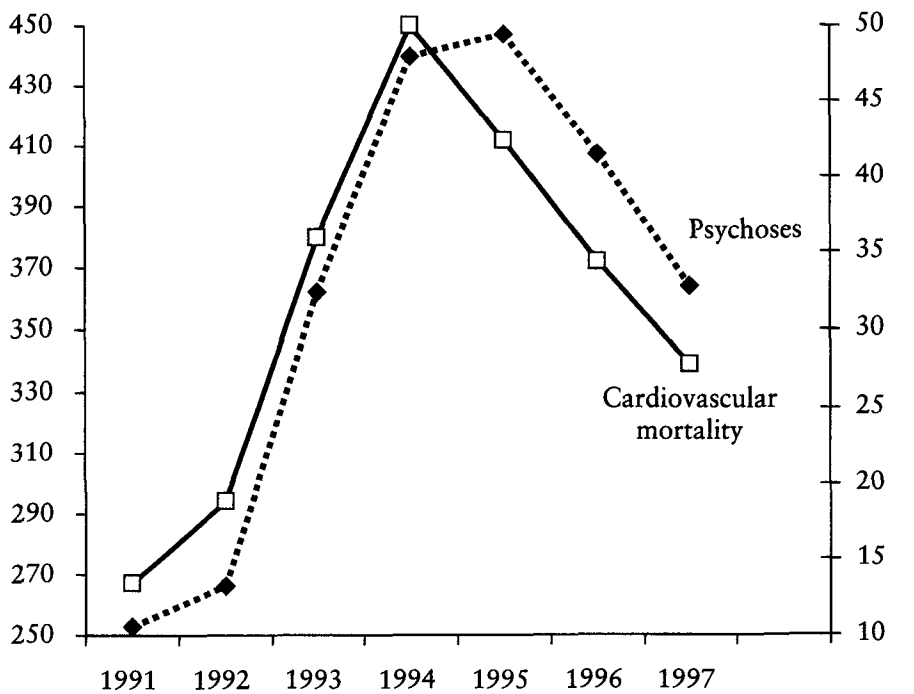

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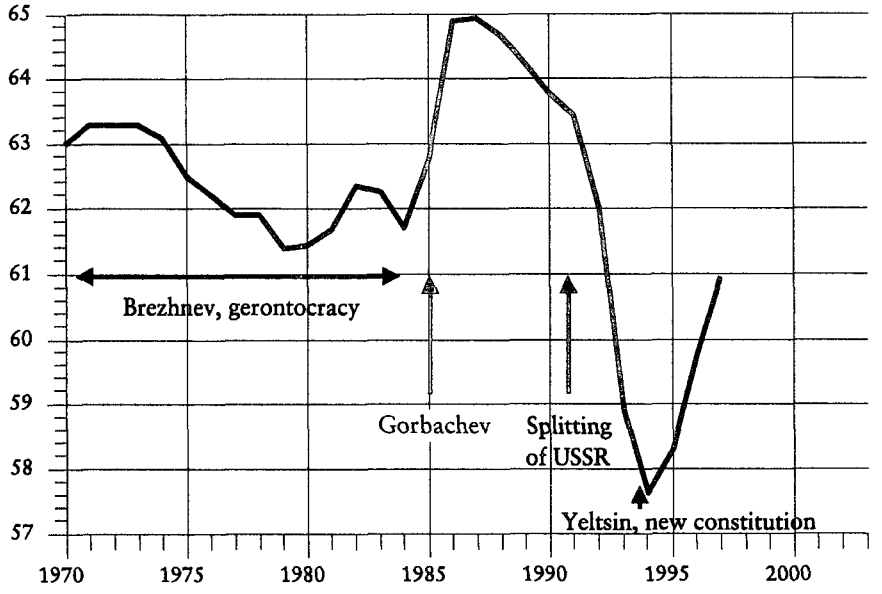
FIGURE 3
Marked effects of key political changes on male life expectancy in the Russian Federation



break in alcoholism rates and what caused the reduction of premature deaths from diseases of the heart and from accidents, homicide, and suicide. One possible, though too simple, explanation at hand might be that the high death rates eliminated a considerable portion of those individuals least able to adapt to the critical changes in the social situation, who responded with extreme alcoholism. I don't believe this "selection-based" interpretation would be able to sufficiently explain the improving public health trend observed in Russia. Very probably, the overall social environment has improved in the Russian Federation, and this despite a sick president at the head of the country for several years and the prevailing political instability.

Long-term surveys completed in recent years have underlined the importance of mental factors, in particular hopelessness and despair, in the development of cardiovascular diseases. Having gone through the hell of the twentieth century, the Russian population seems to be especially susceptible to these factors: Any time a new hope appears, the population's health improves — and vice versa. In conditions of disillusionment, frustration, and loss of hope, Russians might reach for their vodka, leading to decay in their health conditions. Figure 3 suggests that these considerations may not be merely hypothetical: Life expectancy of Russians, relatively low in the early '70s, slightly dropped during the times of stagnation under Brezhnev. Life expectancy started dramatically increasing in 1985, after Gorbachev's perestroika set in. There was a period of disillusion and shortened life

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expectancy in the late 1980s which markedly deepened after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The end of 1993 was rather dramatic in the Russian Federation. Disputes between the parliament and the president would result in the declaration of a state of emergency, and the new Russian Constitution of December 1993 granted President Yeltsin extraordinary powers. Both the legislative and the executive power were concentrated in the hands of a single man — the president. These changes may have poured new hope for the consolidation of the economic situation into the souls of Russians, whose life expectancy started increasing again after 1994.

The further socioeconomic development of Russia will be crucial for the health condition of its population. Any society will find, somewhere in the depth of its own structure, some feedback thanks to which the pendulum of health condition can be swung to normal. Nevertheless, normalization in the Russian Federation will certainly be more difficult than in the post-totalitarian Central Europe. Russian politicians should carefully monitor the development of their country's public health parameters as indicators of successful or unsuccessful outcomes of political and economic reforms.

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NOTES

[1] *Health for All.* Statistical database 1999. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, 1999.

[2] See Emil Ginter, "Cardiovascular risk factors in the former communist countries. Analysis of 40 European MONICA populations," *European Journal of Epidemiology*, vol. 11 (1995), pp. 199-205; Peka Puska et al., "Cardiovascular risk factors in the Republic of Karelia, Russia, and in North Karelia, Finland," *International Journal of Epidemiology*, vol. 22 (1993), pp. 1048-1055; Margaret Kristenson et al., "Antioxidant state and mortality from coronary heart disease in Lithuanian and Swedish men: concomitant cross sectional study of men aged 50," *British Medical Journal,* vol. 314, (1997), pp. 629-633.

[3] See Tatu Matilainen et al., "Plasma ascorbic acid concentrations in the Republic of Karelia, Russia and in North Karelia, Finland," *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, vol. 50 (1996), pp. 115-20; Emil Ginter, "Cardiovascular disease prevention in Eastern Europe," *Nutrition*, vol. 14 (1998), pp. 452-457.

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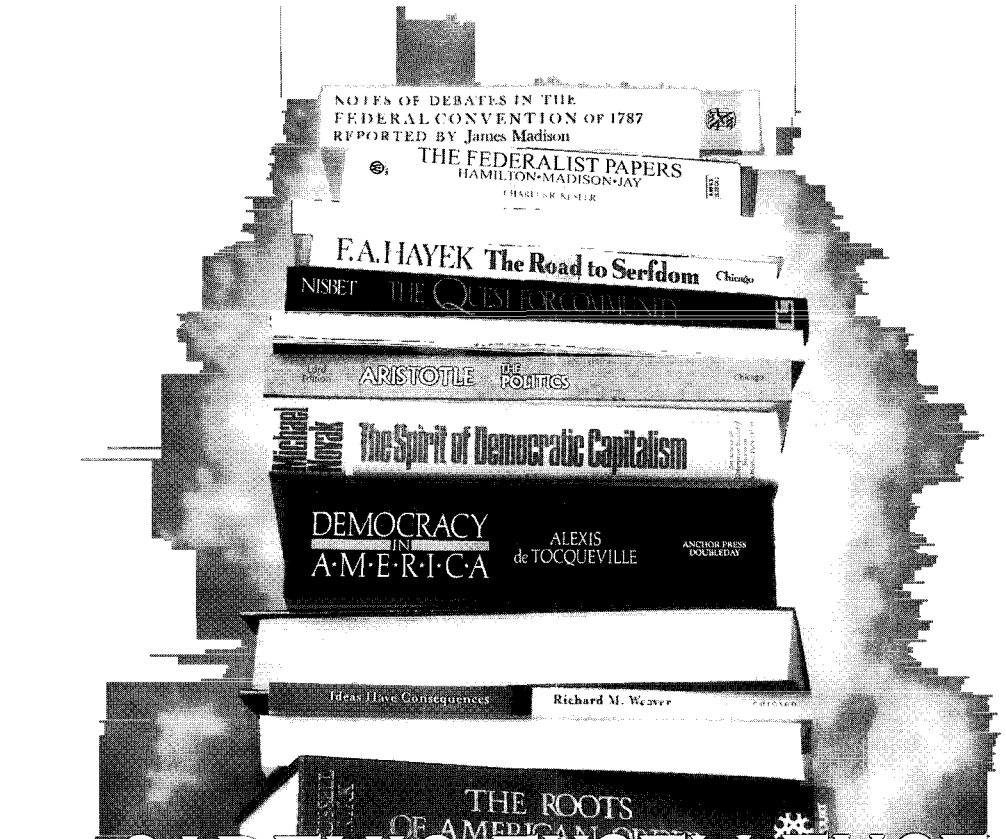

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